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THE GLADIATORS:

A Tale of Rome and Judæa.

BY

G. J. WHYTE MELVILLE,

AUTHOR OF 'DIGBY GRAND,' 'THE INTERPRETER,' 'HOLMBY HOUSE,'
'THE QUEEN'S MARIES,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE GLADIATORS.

VOL. III.

MOIRA.

CHAPTER I.

“A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.”

THE Feast of the Passover was at hand ; the feast that was wont to call the children of Israel out of all parts of Syria to worship in the Holy City ; the feast that had celebrated their deliverance from the relentless grasp of Pharaoh ; that was ordained to mark the fulfilment of prophecy in the downfall of the chosen people, and their national extinction under the imperial might of Rome. Nevertheless, even this, the last Passover held in that Temple, of which Solomon was the founder, and in the destruction of which, notwithstanding

its sacred character, not one stone was permitted to remain upon another, had collected vast multitudes of the descendants of Abraham from all parts of Judæa, Samaria, Galilee, Perea, and other regions, to increase the sufferings of famine, and enhance the horrors of a siege. True to the character of their religion, rigidly observant of outward ceremonies, and admitting no exemptions from the requirements of the law, they swarmed in thousands and tens of thousands to their devoted city, round which even now Titus was drawing closer and closer the iron band of blockade, over which the Roman Eagles were hovering, ere they swooped down irresistible on their prey.

There was the hush of coming destruction in the very stillness of the Syrian noon, as it glowed on the white carved pinnacles of the temple, and flashed from its golden roof. There was a menace in the tall, black cypresses, pointing as it were with warning gesture towards the sky. There was a loathsome reality of carnage about the frequent vulture, poised on his wide wings over every open space, or flapping heavily away with loaded gorge and dripping beak, from his hideous meal. Jerusalem lay like some royal lady in her death-pang; the fair face changed, and livid in its

ghastly beauty, the queenly brow warped beneath its diadem, and the wasted limbs quivering with agony under their robe of scarlet and gold.

Inside the walls, splendour and misery, unholy mirth and abject despair, the pomp of war and the pressure of starvation, were mingled in frightful contrast. Beneath the shadow of princely edifices dead bodies lay unburied and uncared-for in the streets. Wherever was a foot or two of shelter from the sun, there some poor wretch seemed to have dragged himself to die. Marble pillars, lofty porches, white terraces, and luxuriant gardens denoted the wealth of the city, and the pride of its inhabitants; yet squalid figures crawling about, bent low towards the ground, sought eagerly here and there for every substance that could be converted into nourishment, and the absence of all offal and refuse on the pavement, denoted the sad scarcity even of such loathsome food.

The city of Jerusalem, built upon two opposite hills, of which the plan of the streets running from top to bottom in each, and separated only by a narrow valley, exactly corresponded, was admirably adapted to purposes of defence. The higher hill, on which was situated the upper town and the holy Temple, might, from the very nature of

its position be considered impregnable; and even the lower offered on its outside so steep and precipitous an ascent, as to be almost inaccessible by regular troops. In addition to its natural strength, the city was further defended by walls of enormous height and solidity, protected by large square towers, each capable of containing a formidable garrison, and supplied with reservoirs of water and all other necessities of war. Herod the Great, who, notwithstanding his vices, his crimes, and his occasional fits of passion amounting to madness, possessed the qualities both of a statesman and a soldier, had not neglected the means at his disposal for the security of his capital. He had himself superintended the raising of one of these walls at great care and expense, and had added to it three lofty towers, which he named after his friend, his brother, and his ill-fated wife.* These were constructed of huge blocks of marble, fitted to each other with such nicety, and afterwards wrought out by the workman's hand with such skill, that the whole edifice appeared to be cut from one gigantic mass of stone.

* Hippius, Phasaelus, and lovely Mariamne, for whom, in the dead of night, the great king used to call out in his agony of remorse when she was no more.

In the days, too, of that magnificent monarch, these towers were nothing less than palaces within, containing guest-chambers, banqueting-rooms, porticoes, nay, even fountains, gardens, and cisterns, with great store of precious stones, gold and silver vessels, and all the barbaric wealth of Judæa's fierce and powerful king. Defended by Herod, even a Roman army might have turned away discomfited from before Jerusalem.

Agrippa, too, the first of that name, who was afterwards stricken with a loathsome disease, and “eaten of worms,” like a mere mortal, while he affected the attributes of a god, commenced a system of fortification to surround the city, which would have laughed to scorn the efforts of an enemy; but the Jewish monarch was too dependent on his imperial master at Rome to brave his suspicion by proceeding with it, and although a wall of magnificent design was begun, and even raised to a considerable height, it was never finished in the stupendous proportions originally intended. The Jews, indeed, after the death of its founder, strengthened it considerably, and completed it for purposes of defence, but not to the extent by which Agrippa proposed to render the town impregnable.

And even had Jerusalem been entered and invested by an enemy, the Temple, which was also the citadel of the place, had yet to be taken. This magnificent building, the very stronghold of the wealth and devotion of Judæa, the very symbol of that nationality which was still so prized by the posterity of Jacob, was situated on the summit of the higher hill, from which it looked down and commanded both the upper and lower cities. On three sides it was artificially fortified with extreme caution, while on the fourth, it was so precipitous as to defy even the chances of a surprise. To possess the Temple was to hold the whole town as it were in hand ; nor was its position less a matter of importance to the assailed, than its splendour rendered it an object of cupidity to the assailants. Every ornament of architecture was lavished upon its cloisters, its pillars, its porticoes, and its walls. Its outward gates even, according to their respective positions, were brass, silver, and gold ; its beams were of cedar, and other choice woods inlaid with the precious metal, which was also thickly spread over door-posts, candlesticks, cornices—everything that would admit of such costly decoration. The fifteen steps that led from the Court of the Women to the great

Corinthian gate, with its double doors of forty cubits high, were worth as many talents of gold as they numbered.*

To those who entered far enough to behold what was termed the Inner Temple, a sight was presented which dazzled eyes accustomed to the splendour of the greatest monarchs on earth. Its whole front was covered with plates of beaten gold; vines bearing clusters of grapes the size of a man's figure, all of solid gold, were twined about and around its gates, of which the spikes were pointed sharp, that birds might not pollute them by perching there. Within were golden doors of fifty-five cubits in height; and before this entrance hung the celebrated veil of the Temple. It consisted of a curtain, embroidered with blue, fine linen, scarlet and purple, signifying by mystical interpretation, a figure of the universe, wherein the flax typified earth, the blue, air, the scarlet, fire, and the purple, water.

Within this sumptuous shrine were contained the candlestick, the table of shew-bread, and the altar of incense: the seven lamps of the first, denoting the seven planets of heaven; the twelve loaves on the second, representing the circle of

* Josephus, 'Wars of the Jews,' book v. sec. 5.

the zodiac and the year ; while the thirteen sweet-smelling spices on the third, reminded men of the Great Giver of all good things in the whole world.

In the inmost part again of this inner Temple was that sacred space, into which mortal eye might not look, nor mortal step enter. Secluded, awful, invisible, divested of all material object, it typified forcibly to the Jew the nature of that spiritual worship which was taught him through Abraham and the Patriarchs, direct from heaven.

All men, however, of all creeds and nations, might gaze upon the outward front of the Temple, and judge by the magnificence of the covering the costly splendour of the shrine it contained. While a dome of pure white marble rose above it like a mountain of snow, the front itself of the Temple was overlaid with massive plates of gold, so that when it flashed in the sunrise men could no more look upon it than on the god of day himself.

Far off in his camp, watching the beleaguered city, how often may the Roman soldier have pondered in covetous admiration, speculating on the strength of its defenders and the value of his prey !

The Temple of Jerusalem then was celebrated through all the known earth for its size, its splendour, and its untold wealth. The town, strong in

its natural position and its artificial defences, garrisoned, moreover, by a fierce and warlike people, whose impetuous valour could be gauged by no calculations of military experience, was justly esteemed so impregnable a fortress, as might mock the attack of a Roman army even under such a leader as the son of Vespasian. Had it been assailed by none other than the enemy outside the walls, the Holy Place need never have been desecrated and despoiled by the Legions, the baffled Eagles would have been driven westward, balked of their glorious prey.

But here was a "house divided against itself." The dissension within the walls was far more terrible than the foe without. Blood flowed faster in the streets than on the ramparts. Many causes, originating in his past history, had combined to shake the loyalty and undermine the nationality of the Jew. Perhaps, for the wisest purposes, it seems ordained that true religion should be especially prone to schism. Humanity, however high its aspirations, cannot be wholly refined from its earthly dross; and those who are the most in earnest are sometimes the most captious and unforgiving. While worship for his Maker appears to be a natural instinct of man, it needed a teacher

direct from heaven to inculcate forbearance and brotherly love. The Jews were sufficiently ill-disposed to those of their own faith, who differed with them on unimportant points of doctrine, or minute observance of outward ceremonies; but where the heresy extended to fundamental tenets of their creed, they seemed to have hated each other honestly, rancorously, and mercilessly, as only brethren can.

Now for many generations they had been divided into three principal sects, differing widely in belief, principle, and practice. These were distinguished by the names of Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. The first, as is well-known, were rigid observers of the traditional law, handed down to them from their fathers, attaching fully as much importance to its letter as to its spirit. With a vague belief in what is understood by the term predestination, they yet allowed to mankind the choice between good and evil, confounding, perhaps, the foreknowledge of the Creator, with the free-will of the creature, and believed in the immortality of souls, and the doctrine of eternal punishment. Their failings seem to have been inordinate religious pride, an undue exaltation of outward forms to the neglect of that which they

symbolized, a grasping ambition of priestly power, and an utter want of charity for those who differed in opinion with themselves.

The Sadducees, though professing belief in the Deity, argued an entire absence of influence from above on the conduct of the human race. Limiting the dispensation of reward and punishment to this world, they esteemed it a matter of choice with mankind to earn the one or incur the other; and as they utterly ignored the life to come, were content to enjoy temporal blessings, and to deprecate physical evil alone. Though wanting a certain genial philosophy on which the heathen prided himself, the Sadducee, both in principles and practice, seems closely to have resembled the Epicurean of ancient Greece and Rome.

But there was also a third sect which numbered many votaries throughout Judæa, in whose tenets we discover several points of similarity with our own, and whose ranks, it is not unfair to suppose, furnished numbers of the early converts to Christianity. These were the Essenes, a persuasion that rejected pleasure as a positive evil, and with whom a community of goods was the prevailing and fundamental rule of the order.

These men, while they affected celibacy, chose

out the children of others to provide for and educate. While they neither bought nor sold, they never wanted the necessities of life, for each gave and received ungrudgingly, according to his own and his neighbour's need. While they despised riches, they practised a strict economy, appointing stewards to care for and dispense that common patrimony which was raised by the joint subscription of all. Scattered over the whole country, in every city they were sure of finding a home, and none took on a journey either money, food, or raiment, because he was provided by his brethren with all he required wherever he stopped to rest. Their piety, too, was exemplary. Before sunrise not a word was spoken referring to earthly concerns, but public prayer was offered, imploring the blessing of light day by day before it came. Then they dispersed to their different handicrafts, by which they earned wages for the general purse. Meeting together once more, they bathed in cold water and sat down in white garments to their temperate meal, in which a sufficiency, and no more, was provided for each person, and again separated to labour till the evening, when they assembled for supper in the same manner before going to rest.

The vows taken by all who were admitted into their society, and that only after a two-years' probation, sufficiently indicated the purity and benevolence of their code. These swore to observe piety towards God, and justice towards men; to do no one an injury, either voluntarily or by command of others; to avoid the evil, and to aid the good; to obey legal authority as coming from above; to love truth, and openly reprove a lie; to keep the hands clean from theft, and the heart from unfair gain; neither to conceal anything from their own sect, nor to discover their secrets to others, but to guard them with life; also to impart these doctrines to a proselyte literally and exactly as each had received them himself.

If one of the order committed any grievous sin, he was cast out of their society for a time, a sentence which implied starvation, as he had previously sworn never to eat save in the presence of his brethren. When in the last stage of exhaustion he was received again, as having suffered a punishment commensurate with his crime, and which, by the maceration of the body, should purify and save the soul.

With such tenets and such training, the Essenes were conspicuous for their confidence in danger,

their endurance of privation, and their contempt for death. The flesh they despised as the mere corruptible covering of the spirit, that imperishable essence, of which the aspiration was ever upwards, and which, when released from prison, in obedience to the dictates of its very nature, flew direct to heaven.

Undoubtedly such doctrines as these, scattered here and there throughout the land, partially redeemed the Jewish character from the fierce unnatural stage of fanaticism, to which it had arrived at the period of the Christian era—afforded, it may be, a leavening which preserved the whole people from utter reprobation ; and helped, perhaps, to smooth the way for those pioneers, who carried the good tidings first heard beneath the star of Bethlehem, westward through the world.

But at the period when Jerusalem lay beleaguered by Titus and his legions, three political parties raged within her walls, to whose furious fanaticism her three religious sects could offer no comparison. The first and most moderate of these, though men who scrupled not to enforce their opinions with violence, had considerable influence with the great bulk of the populace, and were, indeed, more than either of the others, free from

selfish motives, and sincere in their desire for the common good. They affected a great concern for the safety and credit of their religion, making no small outcry at the fact that certain stones and timber, provided formerly by Agrippa for the decoration of the Temple, had been desecrated by being applied to the repair of the defences and the construction of engines of war. They observed, also, how the rivalry of faction, in which, nevertheless, they took a prominent part, devastated the city more than any efforts of the enemy ; and they did not scruple to paralyse the energies of the besieged, by averring that the military rule of the Romans, wise and temperate, though despotic, was preferable to the alternations of tyranny and anarchy under which they lived.

This numerous party was especially displeasing to Eleazar, whose restless force of character, and fanatical courage, were impatient of any attempt at capitulation, who was determined on resistance to the death, and the utter destruction of the Holy City rather than its surrender.

He was now living in the element of storm and strife, which seemed most congenial to his nature. No longer a foreign intriguer, disguised in poor attire, and hiding his head in a back street of

Rome, the Jew seemed to put on fresh valour every day with his breastplate, and walked abroad in the streets or directed operations from the ramparts; a mark for friend and foe in his splendid armour, with the port of a warrior, a patriarch, and a king.

He was avowedly at the head of a numerous section of the seditious, who had adopted the title of Zealots, and who, affecting the warmest enthusiasm in the cause of patriotism and religion, were utterly unscrupulous as to the means by which they furthered their own objects and aggrandizement. Their practice was indeed much opposed to the principles they professed, and to that zeal for religion from which they took their name. They had not scrupled to cast lots for the priesthood, and to confer the highest and holiest office of the nation on an illiterate rustic, whose only claim to the sacerdotal dignity consisted in his relationship with one of the pontifical tribes. Oppression, insult, and rapine inflicted on their countrymen had rendered the very name of Zealot hateful to the mass of the people; but they numbered in their ranks many desperate and determined men, skilled in the use of arms, and ready to perpetrate any act of violence on friend

or foe. In the hands of a bold unscrupulous leader, they were like sharp and efficient weapons. As such, Eleazar considered them, keeping them under his own control and fit for immediate use.

The third of these factions, which was also perhaps the most numerous, excited the apprehensions of the more peaceably disposed, no less than the hatred of the last-mentioned party who had put Eleazar at their head. It was led by a man distinguished alike for consummate duplicity and reckless daring,—John of Gischala, so called from a small town in Judæa, the inhabitants of which he had influenced to hold out against the Romans, and whence he had himself escaped by a stratagem, redounding as much to the clemency of Titus as to his own dishonour.

Gischala being inhabited by a rural and unwarlike population, unprovided besides with defences against regular troops, would have fallen an easy prey to the prince with his handful of horsemen, had it not been for that disposition to clemency which Titus, in common with other great warriors, seems to have indulged when occasion offered. Knowing that if the place were carried by storm it would be impossible to restrain

his soldiers from putting the inhabitants to the sword, he rode in person within earshot of the wall, and exhorted the defenders to open their gates and trust to his forbearance, a proposal to which John, who with his adherents completely overmastered and dominated the population, took upon himself to reply.

He reminded the Roman commander that it was the Sabbath, a day on which not only was it unlawful for the Jews to undertake any matters of war, policy, or business, but even to treat of such, and therefore they could not so much as entertain the present proposals of peace; but that if the Romans would give them four-and-twenty hours' respite, during which period they could surround the city with their camp, so that none could escape from it, the keys of the gate should be given up to him on the following day, when he might enter in triumph and take possession of the place.

Titus withdrew accordingly, probably for want of forage, to a village at some distance, and John with his followers, accompanied by a multitude of women and children, whom he afterwards abandoned, made his escape in the night and fled to Jerusalem.

After such a breach of faith, he could expect nothing from the clemency of the Roman general ; so that John of Gischala, like many others of the besieged, might be said to fight with a rope round his neck.

Within the city there had now been a fierce struggle for power between the Zealots under Eleazar, and the reckless party, called by different opprobrious terms, of which robbers was the mildest, who followed the fortunes of John. The peaceful section, unable to make head against these two, looked anxiously for the entrance of the Eagles, many indeed of the wealthier deserting when practicable to the camp of the enemy. Meanwhile the Romans pushed the siege vigorously. Their army now consisted of Vespasian's choicest legions, commanded by his son in person. Their engines of war were numerous and powerful. Skilful, scientific, exact in discipline, and unimpeachable in courage, they were gradually but surely converging, in all their strength, for one conclusive effort, on the devoted city. Already the second wall had been taken, retaken in a desperate struggle by the besieged, and once more stormed and carried by the

Legions. Famine too, with her cruel hand, was withering the strongest arms and chilling the bravest hearts in the city. It was time to forget self-interest, faction, fanaticism, everything but the nationality of Judæa, and the enemy at the gate.



CHAPTER II.

THE LION OF JUDAH.



LEAZAR had resolved to obtain supreme command. In a crisis like the present, no divided authority could be expected to offer a successful resistance. John of Gischala must be ruined by any means and at any sacrifice. His unscrupulous rival, regardless of honour, truth, every consideration but the rescue of his country, laid his plans accordingly.

With a plausible pretence of being reconciled, and thus amalgamating two formidable armies for the common good, he proposed to hold a conference with John in the outer court of the Temple, where, in presence of the elders and chief men of the city, they should arrange their past differences and enter into a compact of alliance

for the future. The Great Council of the nation, ostensibly the rulers of public affairs, and influenced alternately by the two antagonists, were to be present. Eleazar thought it would go hard, but that, with his own persuasive powers and public services, he should gain some signal advantage over his adversary ere they separated.

He appeared, accordingly, at the place of conference, splendidly armed indeed in his own person, but accompanied by a small retinue of adherents all attired in long peaceful robes, as though inviting the confidence of his enemy. Observant eyes, it is true, and attentive ears, caught the occasional clank and glitter of steel under these innocent linen mantles, and the friends, if few in number, were of tried valour and fidelity, while a mob of warlike men outside, who had gathered ostensibly to look idly on, belonged obviously to the party of the Zealots. Nevertheless, Eleazar had so contrived matters, that while he guarded against surprise, he should appear before the Council as a suppliant imploring justice rather than a leader dictating terms. He took up his position, accordingly, at the lower end of the Court, and after a deep obeisance to the assembled elders, stood, as it were, in the back-

ground, assuming an air of humility somewhat at variance with his noble and warlike exterior.

His rival, on the contrary, whose followers completely blocked up the entrance from the Temple, through which he had thought it becoming to arrive, strode into the midst, with a proud and insolent bearing, scarcely deigning to acknowledge the salutations he received, and glancing from time to time back amongst his adherents, with scornful smiles that seemed to express a fierce contempt for the whole proceeding.

He was a man who, though scarcely past his youth, wore in his face the traces of his vicious and disorderly career. His features were flushed and swollen with intemperance; and the deep lines about his mouth only half concealed by the long moustache and beard denoted the existence of violent passions, indulged habitually to excess. His large stature and powerful frame set off the magnificence of his dress and armour, nor was his eye without a flash of daring and defiance that boded evil to an enemy; but his bearing, bold as it was, smacked rather of the outlaw than the soldier, and his rude abrupt gestures contrasted disadvantageously with the cool self-possession of his rival.

The latter, asking permission, as it were, of the Senate, by another respectful obeisance, walked frankly into the middle of the Court to meet his foe. John changed colour visibly, and his hand stole to the dagger at his belt. He seemed to expect the treachery of which he felt himself capable; but Eleazar, halting a full pace off, looked him steadily in the face and held out his right hand in token of amity and reconciliation. A murmur of approval ran through the Senate, which increased John's uncertainty how to act; but after a moment's hesitation, unwillingly and with a bad grace, he gave his own in return.

Eleazar's action, though apparently so frank and spontaneous, was the result of calculation. He had now made the impression he desired on the Senate, and secured the favourable hearing which he believed was alone necessary for his triumph.

"We have been enemies," said he, releasing the other's hand, and turning to the assembly, while his full voice rang through the whole Court, and every syllable reached the listeners outside. "We have been fair and open enemies in the belief that each was opposed to the interests of his country; but the privations we have now undergone in the same cause, the perils we have con-

fronted side by side on the same ramparts, must have convinced us that however we may differ in our political tenets, nay, in our religious practices, we are equally sincere in a determination to shed our last drop of blood in the defence of the Holy City from the pollution of the heathen. This is no time for any consideration but one — Jerusalem is invested, the Temple is threatened, and the enemy at the gate. I give up all claim to authority, save as a leader of armed men. I yield precedence in rank, in council, in everything but danger. I devote my sword and my life to the salvation of Judæa! Who is on my side?"

Loud acclamations followed this generous avowal; and it was obvious that Eleazar's influence was more than ever in the ascendant. It was no time for John to stem the torrent of popular feeling, and he wisely floated with the stream. Putting a strong control upon his wrath, he expressed to the Senate in a few hesitating words his consent to act in unison with his rival, under their orders as Supreme Council of the nation; a concession which elicited groans and murmurs from his own partizans, many of whom forced their way with insolent threats and angry gestures into the Court.

Eleazar did not suffer the opportunity to escape without a fresh effort for the downfall of his adversary.

"There are men," said he, pointing to the disaffected, and raising his voice in full clear tones, "who had better have swelled the ranks of the enemy than stood side by side with Judah on the ramparts of Agrippa's wall. They may be brave in battle, but it is with a fierce undisciplined courage more dangerous to friend than foe. Their very leader, bold and skilful soldier as he is, cannot restrain such mutineers even in the august presence of the Council. Their excesses are laid to his charge; and a worthy and patriotic commander becomes the scape-goat of a few ruffians, whose crimes he is powerless to prevent. John of Gischala, we have this day exchanged the right hand of fellowship. We are friends, nay, we are brothers-in-arms, once more. I call upon thee, as a brother, to dismiss these robbers, these paid cut-throats, whom our very enemies stigmatize as 'Sicarii,' and to cast in thy lot with thine own people, and with thy father's house!"

John shot an eager glance from his rival to his followers. The latter were bending angry brows upon the speaker, and seemed sufficiently

discontented with their own leader that he should listen tamely to such a proposal. Swords, too, were drawn by those in the rear, and brandished fiercely over the heads of the seething mass. For an instant the thought crossed his mind, that he had force enough to put the opposing assemblage, Senate and all, to the sword; but his quick practised glance taught him at the same time, that Eleazar's party gathered quietly towards their chief, with a confidence unusual in men really without arms, and a methodical precision that denoted previous arrangement; also that certain signals passed from them to the crowd, and that the Court was filling rapidly from the multitude without.

He determined then to dissemble for a time, and turned to the Senate with a far more deferential air than he had yet assumed.

"I appeal to the elders of Judah," said he, repressing at the same by a gesture the turbulence of his followers. "I am content to abide by the decision of the National Council. Is to-day a fitting season for the reduction of our armament? Shall I choose the present occasion to disband a body of disciplined soldiers, and turn a host of outraged and revengeful men loose into the city with

swords in their hands? Have we not already enough idle mouths to feed, or can we spare a single javelin from the walls? My *brother*”—he laid a bitter stress upon the word, and griped the haft of his dagger under his mantle while he spoke it—“My *brother* gives strange counsel, but I am willing to believe it sincere. I too, though the words drop not like honey from my beard as from his, have a right to be heard. Did I not leave Gischala and my father’s vineyard for a prey to the enemy? Did I not fool the whole Roman army, and mock Titus to his face, that I might join in the defence of Jerusalem? and shall I be schooled like an infant, or impeached for a traitor to-day? Judge me by the result. I was on the walls this morning; I saw not my *brother* there. The enemy were preparing for an assault. The engine they call ‘Victory’ had been moved yet nearer by a hundred cubits. While we prate here the Eagles are advancing—To the walls! To the walls, I say! Every man who calls himself a Jew; be he Priest or Levite, Pharisee or Sadducee, Zealot or Essene. Let us see whether John and his Sicarii are not as forward in the ranks of the enemy as this *brother* of mine, Eleazar, and the bravest he can bring!”

Thus speaking, and regardless of the presence in which he stood, John drew his sword and placed himself at the head of his adherents, who with loud shouts demanded to be led instantly to the ramparts. The enthusiasm spread like wild-fire, and even communicated itself to the Council. Eleazar's own friends caught the contagion, and the whole mass poured out of the Temple, and forming into bands in the streets, hurried tumultuously to the walls.

What John had stated to the Council was indeed true. The Romans, who had previously demolished the outer wall and a considerable portion of the suburbs, had now for the second time obtained possession of the second wall, and of the high flanking tower called Antonia, which John, to do him justice, had defended with great gallantry after he had retaken it once from the assailants. It was from this point of vantage that an attack was now organized by the flower of the Roman army, having for its object the overthrow of her last defences and complete reduction of the city. When Eleazar and his rival appeared with their respective bands they proved a welcome reinforcement to the defenders, who, despite of their stubborn resistance, were hardly pressed by the enemy.

Every able-bodied Jew was a soldier on occasion. Troops thus composed are invariably more formidable in attack than defence. They have usually undaunted courage and a blind head-long valour that sometimes defies the calculations of military science or experience; but they are also susceptible of panic under reverses, and lack the cohesion and solidity which is only found in those who make warfare the profession of a life-time. The Jew armed with spear and sword, uttering wild cries as he leaped to the assault, was nearly irresistible; but once repulsed his final discomfiture was imminent. The Roman, on the contrary, never suffered himself to be drawn out of his ranks by unforeseen successes, and preserved the same methodical order in the advance as the retreat. He was not therefore to be lured into an ambush however well disguised; and even when outnumbered by a superior force, could retire without defeat.

The constitution of the legion too was especially adapted to enhance the self-reliance of well-drilled troops. Every Roman legion was a small army in itself, containing its proportion of infantry, cavalry, engines of war, and means for conveyance of baggage.

A legion finding itself ever so unexpectedly detached from the main body, was at no loss for those necessities without which an army melts away like snow in the sunshine, and was capable of independent action, in any country and under any circumstances. Each man too had perfect confidence in himself and his comrades; and while it was esteemed so high a disgrace to be taken prisoner that many soldiers have been known rather to die by their own hands, than submit to such dishonour, it is not surprising that the Imperial armies were often found to extricate themselves with credit from positions which would have insured the destruction of any other troops in the world.

The internal arrangement, too, of every cohort, a title perhaps answering to the modern word regiment, as does the legion to that of division, was calculated to promote individual intelligence and energy in the ranks. Every soldier not only fought, but fed, slept, marched and toiled under the immediate eye of his *decurion* or captain of ten, who again was directly responsible for those under his orders to his centurion, or captain of a hundred.

A certain number of these centuries or com-

panies, varying according to circumstances, constituted a maniple, two of which made up the cohort. Every legion consisted of ten cohorts, under the charge of but six tribunes, who seem to have entered on their onerous office in rotation. These were again subservient to the General, who, under the different titles of prætor, consul, &c., commanded the whole legion.

The private soldiers were armed with shield, breastplate, helmet, spear, sword and dagger; but in addition to his weapons every man carried a set of intrenching tools, and on occasion, two or more strong stakes, for the rapid erection of palisades. All were, indeed, robust labourers, and skilful mechanics, as well as invincible combatants.

The Jews, therefore, though a fierce and warlike nation, had but little chance against the conquerors of the world. It was but their characteristic self-devotion that enabled them to hold Titus and his legions so long in check. Their desperate sallies were occasionally crowned with success, and the generous Roman seems to have respected the valour and the misfortunes of his foe; but it must have been obvious to so skilful a leader, that his reduction of Jerusalem and

eventual possession of all Judæa was a question only of time.

At an earlier period of the siege the Romans had made a wide and shallow cutting capable of sheltering infantry, for the purpose of advancing their engines closer to the wall, but from the nature of the soil this work had been afterwards discontinued. It now formed a moderately secure covered way, enabling the besieged to reach within a short distance of the Tower of Antonia, the retaking of which was of the last importance—none the less that from its summit Titus himself was directing the operations of his army. There was a breach in this tower on its inner side, which the Romans strove in vain to repair, harassed as they were by showers of darts and javelins from the enemy on the wall. More than once, in attempting to make it good at night, their materials had been burnt and themselves driven back upon their works with great loss, by the valour of the besieged. The tower of Antonia was indeed the key to the possession of the second wall. Could it but be retaken, as it had already been, the Jews might find themselves once more with two strong lines of defence between the upper city and the foe.

When Eleazar and John, at the head of their respective parties, now mingled indiscriminately together, reached the summit of the inner wall, they witnessed a fierce and desperate struggle in the open space below.

Esca, no longer in the position of a mere household slave, but the friend and client of the most influential man in Jerusalem, who had admitted him, men said, as a proselyte to his faith, and was about to bestow on him his daughter in marriage, had already so distinguished himself by various feats of arms in the defence of the city as to be esteemed one of the boldest leaders in the Jewish army. Panting to achieve a high reputation, which he sometimes dared to hope might gain him all he wished for on earth—the hand of Mariamne—and sharing to a great extent with the besieged their veneration for the Temple and abhorrence of a foreign yoke, the Briton lost no opportunity of adding a leaf to the laurels he had gained, and thrust himself prominently forward in every enterprise demanding an unusual amount of strength and courage. His lofty stature and waving golden hair, so conspicuous amongst the swarthy warriors who surrounded him, were soon well known in the ranks of the Romans, who

bestowed on him the title of the Yellow Hostage, as inferring from his appearance that he must have lately been a stranger in Jerusalem; and many a stout legionary closed in more firmly on his comrade, and raised his shield more warily to the level of his eyes, when he saw those bright locks waving above the press of battle, and the long sword flashing with deadly strokes around that fair young head.

He was now leading a party of chosen warriors along the covered way that has been mentioned to attack the tower of Antonia. For this purpose, the trench had been deepened during the night by the Jews themselves, who had for some days meditated a bold stroke of this nature; and the chosen band had good reason to believe that their movements were unseen and unsuspected by the enemy.

As they deployed into the open space, but a few furlongs from the base of the tower, the Jews caught sight of Titus on the summit, his golden armour flashing in the sun, and with a wild yell of triumph, they made one of their fierce, rushing, disorderly charges to the attack.

They had reached within twenty paces of the breach, when swooping round the angle of the

tower, like a falcon on his prey, came Placidus, at the head of a thousand horsemen, dashing forward with lifted shields and levelled spears amongst the disorganized mass of the Jews, broken by the very impetus of their own advance.

The Tribune had but lately joined the Roman army, having been employed in the subjugation of a remote province of Judæa—a task for which his character made him a peculiarly fit instrument. Enriched by a few months of extortion and rapine, he had taken care to rejoin his commander in time to share with him the crowning triumphs of the siege.

Julius Placidus was a consummate soldier. His vigilance had detected the meditated attack, and his science was prepared to meet it in the most effectual manner. Titus, from the summit of his tower, could not but admire the boldness and rapidity with which the Tribune dashed from his concealment, and launched his cavalry on the astonished foe.

But he had to do with one, who, though his inferior in skill and experience, was his equal in that cool hardihood which can accept and baffle a surprise. Esca had divided his force into two bodies, so that the second might advance in a

dense mass to the support of the first, whether its disorderly attack should be attended by failure or success. This body, though clear of the trench, yet remaining firm in its ranks, now became a rallying point for its comrades, and although a vast number of the Jews were ridden down and speared by the attacking horsemen, there were enough left to form a bristling phalanx, presenting two converging fronts of level steel impervious to the enemy. Placidus observed the manœuvre and ground his teeth in despire; but though his brow lowered for one instant, the evil smile lit up his face the next, for he espied Esca, detached from his band and engaged in rallying its stragglers, nor did he fail to recognise at a glance the man he most hated on earth.

Urging his horse to speed, and even at that moment of gratified fury glancing towards the tower to see whether Titus was looking on, he levelled his spear and bore down upon the Briton in a desperate and irresistible charge. Esca stepped nimbly aside, and receiving the weapon on his buckler, dealt a sweeping sword-cut at the Tribune's head, which stooping to avoid, the latter pulled at his horse's reins so vigorously as to check the animal's career and bring it suddenly

on its haunches. The Briton, watching his opportunity, seized the bit in his powerful grasp, and with the aid of his massive weight and strength, rolled man and horse to the ground in a crashing fall. The Tribune was undermost, and for a moment at the mercy of his adversary. Looking upward with a livid face and deep bitter hatred glaring in his eye, he did but hiss out "Oh, mine enemy!" from between his clenched teeth, and prepared to receive his death-blow; but the hand that was raised to strike, fell quietly to Esca's side, and he turned back through the press of horsemen, buffeting them from him as a swimmer buffets the waves, till he reached his own men. Placidus, rising from the ground, shook his clenched fist at the retreating figure; but he never knew that he owed his preservation to the first fruits of that religion which had now taken root in the breast of his former slave.

When he groaned out in his despair, "Oh, mine enemy!" the Briton remembered that this man had, indeed, shewn himself the bitterest and most implacable of his foes. It was no mere impulse, but the influence of a deep abiding principle, that bade him now forgive and spare for the sake of One whose lessons he was beginning

to learn, and in whose service he had resolved to enter. Amongst all the triumphs and the exploits of that day, there was none more noble than Esca's, when he lowered his sword and turned away, unwilling indeed but resolute, from his fallen foe.

The fight raged fiercely still. Eleazar with his Zealots—John of Gischala with his Robbers—rushed from the walls to the assistance of their countrymen. The Roman force was in its turn outnumbered and surrounded, though Placidus, again on horseback, did all in the power of man to make head against the mass of his assailants. Titus at length ordered the Tenth Legion, called by his own name and constituting the very flower of the Roman army, to the rescue of their countrymen. Commanded by Licinius, in whose cool and steady valour they had perfect confidence, these soon turned the tide of combat, and forced the Jews back to their defences ; not, however, until their General had recognised in the Yellow Hostage, the person of his favourite slave, and thought with a pang, that the fate of war would forbid his ever seeing him face to face again, except as a captive or a corpse.



CHAPTER III.

THE WISDOM OF THE SERPENT.

GVER since the night which changed the imperial master of Rome, Esca had dwelt with Eleazar as if he were a member of the same family and the same creed. Though Mariamne, according to the custom of her nation, confined herself chiefly to the women's apartments, it was impossible that two who loved each other so well as the Jewess and the Briton should reside under the same roof without an occasional interview. These usually took place when the latter returned to unarm, after his military duties ; and though but a short greeting was interchanged, a hurried inquiry, a few words of thanksgiving for his safety, and assurances of her continued affection, these moments were prized and looked forward to

by both, as being the only occasions on which they could enjoy each other's society uninterrupted and alone.

After the repulse of the Tribune's attack beneath the tower of Antonia, Esca returned in triumph to Eleazar's house. He was escorted to the very door by the chief men of the city, and a band of those chosen warriors who had witnessed and shared in his exploits. Mariamne, from the gallery which surrounded it, saw him enter her father's court at the head of her father's friends, heard that father address him before them all in a few soldierlike words of thanks and commendation—nay, even observed him lead the successful combatant away with him as though for some communication of unusual confidence.

The girl's heart leaped within her; and vague hopes, of which she could not have explained the grounds, took possession of her mind. She loved him very dearly: they slept under the same roof, they ate at the same board; notwithstanding the perils of warfare to which she was now habituated they met every day: but this was not enough; something was wanting still; so she watched him depart with her father, and grudged not the loss of her own short interview with its congratulations

that she so longed to pour into his ear, because the indefinite hopes that dawned on her seemed to promise more happiness than she could bear.

Eleazar took the helmet from his brow, and signed to Esca to do the same. Then he filled a measure of wine, and draining the half of it eagerly, handed the rest to his companion. For a few minutes he paced up and down the room, still wearing his breastplate, and with his sword girded to his side, deep in thought, ere turning abruptly to his companion he placed his hand on his shoulder, and said—

“You have eaten my bread—you have drank from my cup. Esca, you are to me as a son; will you do my bidding?”

“Even as a son,” replied the Briton; to whom such an address seemed at once to open the way for the fulfilment of his dearest wishes.

Eleazar ignored the emphasis on the word. It may be that his mind was too entirely engrossed with public interests to admit a thought upon private affairs; it may be that he considered Esca, like the sword upon his thigh, as a strong and serviceable weapon, to be laid aside when no longer wanted for conflict; or it may be that his purpose was honest, and that, after the salvation

of his country, he would have been actuated by the kindlier motives of a father and a friend ; but in the mean time he had a purpose in view, and no considerations of affection or partiality would have led him to swerve from it by a hair's-breadth.

“Look around you,” said he, “and behold the type of Judæa, and especially of Jerusalem, in this very building. See how fair and stately are the walls of my house, how rich its ornaments, how costly its hangings and decorations. Here are ivory, and sandal-wood, and cedar ; webs of divers colours ; robes of purple, stores of fine linen, vessels of silver, and drinking-cups of gold ; frankincense and wine are here in plenty, but of barley we have scarce a few handfuls ; and if the same visitors that my father Abraham entertained on the plains of Mamre were at my door to-day, where should I find a kid that I might slay it, and set it before them to eat ? I have everything here in the house, save that alone without which everything else is of no avail—the daily bread that gives man strength for his daily task. And so is it with my country : we have men, we have weapons, we have wealth ; but we lack that which alone renders those advantages efficient for defence—the constant unshrinking reliance on

itself and its faith, from which a nation derives its daily resources as from its daily bread. There are men here in the city now who would hand Jerusalem over to the heathen without striking another blow in her defence."

"Shame on them!" answered the other, warmly. "Barbarian, stranger as I am, I pledge myself to die there, ere a Roman soldier's foot shall pollute the threshold of the Temple."

"You are a warrior," answered Eleazar; "you have proved it to-day. As a warrior I consult with you on the possibility of our defence. You saw the result of the conflict under the tower of Antonia, and the bravery of the Tenth Legion; we cannot resist another such attack till our defences are repaired. We must gain time. At all hazards, and at any sacrifice, we must gain time."

"In two days the breach might be strengthened," replied the other; "but Titus is an experienced soldier; he was watching us to-day from the summit of his tower. He will hardly delay the assault beyond to-morrow."

"He must!" answered Eleazar, vehemently. "I have my preparations for defence, and in less than two days the city shall be again impregnable."

Listen, Esca; you little know the opposition I have met with, or the hatred I have incurred in overcoming it. I have sought means to preserve the city from all quarters, and have thus given a handle to my enemies that they will not fail to use for my destruction. Have I not taken the holy oil from the sacrifice, to pour boiling on the heads of the besiegers; and will not John of Gischala and the Robbers fling this sacrilege in my teeth when it becomes known? Even at this moment I have seized the small quantity of chaff there is yet remaining in the city, to fill the sacks with which we may neutralize the iron strokes of that heavy battering-ram, which the soldiers themselves call 'Victory.' There is scarce a grain of wheat left, and many a hungry stomach must sleep to-night without even the miserable meal it had promised itself, for want of this poor measure of chaff. Men will curse Eleazar in their prayers. It is cruel work,—cruel work. But, no! I will never abandon my post, and the seed of Jacob shall eat one another for very hunger in the streets, ere I deliver the Holy City into the keeping of the heathen."

Something almost like a tear shone in the eye of this iron-hearted fanatic while he spoke, but

his resolution was not to be shaken ; and he only spoke the truth when he avowed that famine stalking abroad in its most horrible form would be a less hateful sight to him than the crest of a Roman soldier within the walls of Jerusalem.

His brain had been hard at work on his return from the conflict of the day ; and he had woven a plan by which he hoped to gain such a short respite from attack as would enable him to bid defiance to Titus once more. This could only be done, however, with the aid of others, and by means of a perfidy that even he could scarcely reconcile to himself,—that he could not but fear must be repugnant to his agent.

The well-known clemency of the Roman commander, and his earnest wish to spare, if it were possible, the beautiful and sacred city from destruction, had caused him to listen patiently at all times, to any overtures made by the Jews for the temporary suspension of hostilities. Titus seemed not only averse to bloodshed, but also extended his good-will in an extraordinary degree to an enemy whose religion he respected, and whose miseries obtained his sincere compassion. On many occasions he had delayed his orders for a final and probably irresistible assault, in the hope

that the city might be surrendered, and that he could hand over to his father this beautiful prize, undefaced by the violence inflicted on a town taken by storm. The great Roman commander was not only the most skilful leader of his day, but a wise and far-sighted politician, as well as a humane and generous man.

Eleazar knew the character with which he had to deal; but he stifled all scruples of honour in the one consideration, that his first and only duty was to the cause of Judah; yet in his breast were lying dormant the instincts of a brave man, and it was not without misgivings of opposition from his listener, that he disclosed to Esca the scheme by which he hoped to overreach Titus and gain a few hours' respite for the town.

"Two days," said he, resuming his restless walk up and down the apartment—"two days is all I ask—all I require. Two days I *must* have. Listen, young man. I have proved you, I can trust you; and yet the safety of Judah hangs on your fidelity. Swear, by the God of Israel, that you will never reveal the secret I disclose to you this day. It is but known to my brother, my daughter, and myself. You are the adopted son of my house. Swear!"

"I swear!" replied Esca, solemnly; and his hopes grew brighter as he found himself thus admitted, as it were, to a place in the family of the woman he loved.

Eleazar looked from the casement, and through the door, to assure himself against listeners; then he filled the Briton's cup once more, and proceeded with his confidences.

"Around that dried-up fountain," said he, pointing to the terraces on which his stately house was built, "there lie seven slabs of marble, with which its basin is paved. If you put the point of your sword under the left-hand corner of the centre one, you may move it sufficiently to admit your hand. Lift it, and you find a staircase leading to a passage; follow that passage, in which a full-grown man can stand upright, and along which you may grope your way without fear, and you come to an egress choked up with a few faggots and briers. Burst through these, and, lo! you emerge beyond the tower of Antonia, and within fifty paces of the Roman camp. Will you risk yourself amongst the enemy for Judah's sake?"

"I have been nearer the Romans than fifty paces," answered Esca, proudly. "It is no great service you ask; and if they seize upon me as an

escaped slave, and condemn me to the cross, what then? It is but a soldier's duty I am undertaking after all. When shall I depart?"

Eleazar reflected for a moment. The other's unscrupulous, unquestioning fidelity touched even his fierce heart to the quick. It would be, doubtless, death to the messenger, who, notwithstanding his character of herald, would be too surely treated as a mere runaway; but the message must be delivered, and who was there but Esca for him to send? He bent his brows, and proceeded in a harder tone:

"I have confided to you the secret way, that is known to but three besides in Jerusalem. I need keep nothing from you now. You shall bear my written proposals to Titus for a truce till the sun has again set twice, on certain terms; but those terms it will be safer for the messenger not to know. Will you run the risk, and when?"

"This instant, if they are ready," answered the other, boldly; but even while he spoke Chalcas entered the apartment; and Eleazar, conscious of the certain doom to which he was devoting his daughter's preserver and his own guest, shrank from his brother's eye, and would have retired to prepare his missive without farther question.

Fierce and unscrupulous as he was, he could yet feel bitterly for the brave, honest nature that walked so unsuspectingly into the trap he laid. It was one thing to overreach a hostile General, and another to sacrifice a faithful and devoted friend. He had no hesitation in affecting treason to Titus, and promising the Romans that, if they would but grant him that day and the next, to obtain the supremacy of his own faction and chief power within the walls, he would deliver over the City, with the simple condition that the Temple should not be demolished, and the lives of the inhabitants should be spared. He acknowledged no dishonour in the determination which he concealed in his own breast to employ that interval strenuously in defensive works, and when it had elapsed to break faith unhesitatingly with his foe. In the cause of Judah—so thought this fanatic, half-soldier, half-priest—it was but a fair stratagem of war, and would, as a means of preserving the true faith, meet with the direct approval of Heaven. But it seemed hard—very hard, that, to secure these advantages, he must devote to certain destruction one who had sat at his board and lived under his roof for months; and a pang, of which he did not care to trace the origin, smote the

father's heart, when he thought of Mariamne's face, and her question to-morrow, "Where is Esca? and why is he not come back?"

He took his brother aside, and told him, shortly, that Esca was going as a messenger of peace to the Roman camp. Calchas looked him full in the face and shook his head.

"Brother," said he, "thy ways are tortuous, though thy bearing is warlike and bold. Thou trustest too much to the sword of steel and the arm of flesh—the might of man's strength, which a mere pebble on the pavement can bring head-long to the ground, and the scheming of man's brain, which cannot foresee, even for one instant, the trifle that shall baffle and confound it in the next. It is better to trust boldly in the right. This youth is of our own household: he is more to us than friend and kindred. Wouldst thou send him up with his hands bound to the sacrifice? Brother, thou shalt not do this great sin!"

"What would you?" said Eleazar, impatiently. "Every man to his duty. The priest to the offering; the craftsman to his labour; the soldier to the wall. He alone knows the secret passage. Whom have I but Esca to send?"

"I am a man of peace," replied Calchas, and

over his face stole that ray of triumphant confidence which at seasons of danger seemed to brighten it like a glory; "who so fitting to carry a message of peace as myself? You have said, Every one to his appointed task. I cannot—nay, I *would* not—put a breastplate on my worthless body, and a helmet on my old, grey head, and brandish spear, or javelin, or deadly weapon in my feeble hands; but do you think it is because I *fear*? Remember, brother, the blood of the sons of Manahem runs in my veins as in yours, and I, too, have a right to risk every drop of it in the service of my country! Oh! I have sinned! I have sinned!" added the old man, with a burst of contrition, after this momentary outburst. "What am I to speak such words? I, the humblest and least worthy of my Master's servants!"

"You shall not go!" exclaimed Eleazar, covering his face with his hands as the horrid results of such a mission rose before his eyes. Should the Romans keep the herald for a hostage, as most probably they would, until the time of surrender had elapsed, what must be his certain fate? Had they not already crucified more than one such emissary in face of the walls? and could they be expected to show mercy in a case like this? His

love for his brother had been the one humanizing influence of Eleazar's life. It tore his heart now with a grief that was something akin to rage, when he reflected that even that brother, if requisite, must be sacrificed to the cause of Jerusalem.

Esca looked from one to the other apparently unmoved. To him the whole affair seemed simply a matter of duty, in the fulfilment of which he would himself certainly run considerable risk, that did not extend to Calchas. He was perfectly willing to go; but could not, at the same time, refrain from thinking that the latter was the fitter person to undertake such a mission at such a time. He could not guess at the perfidy which Eleazar meditated, and which brought with it its own punishment in his present sufferings for his brother. "I am ready," said he, quietly; resting his hand on his helmet, as though prepared to depart forthwith.

"You shall not go," repeated Calchas, looking fixedly at his brother the while. "I tell thee, Eleazar," he added, with kindling eye and heightened tone, "that I will not stand by and see this murder done. As an escaped slave Esca

will be condemned to death unheard. It may be that they will even subject him to the scourge and worse. As the bearer of terms for a truce, our enemies will treat me as an honoured guest. If thou art determined to persevere, I will frustrate thine intention by force. I need but whisper to the Sanhedrim that Eleazar is trafficking with those outside the walls, and where would be the house of Ben-Manahem? and how long would the Zealots own allegiance to their chief? Nay, brother, such discord and such measures can never be between thee and me. When have we differed in our lives, since we clung together to our mother's knees? Prepare thy missive, I will take it to the Roman camp forthwith, and return in safety as I went. What have I to fear? Am I not protected by Him whom I serve?"

When Eleazar withdrew his hands from his face it was deadly pale, and large drops stood upon his forehead. The struggle had been cruel indeed, but it was over. "Jerusalem before all," was the principle from which he had never been known to swerve, and now he must sacrifice to it that life so much dearer than his own.

"Be it as you will," said he, commanding himself with a strong effort. "You can only leave the city by our secret passage. The scroll shall be ready at midnight. It must be in the hand of Titus by dawn!"



CHAPTER IV.

THE MASTERS OF THE WORLD.

AN hour before sunrise Calchas was stopped by one of the sentinels on the verge of the Roman camp. He had made his escape from the city, as he hoped, without arousing the suspicions of the besieged. The outskirts of Jerusalem were, indeed, watched almost as narrowly by its defenders as its assailants, for so many of the peaceful inhabitants had already taken refuge with the latter, and so many more were waiting their opportunity to fly from the horrors within the walls, and trust to the mercy of the conquerors without, that a strict guard had been placed by the national party on the different gates of the city, and all communication with the enemy forbidden and made punishable with death. It was no light risk,

therefore, that Calchas took upon himself in carrying his brother's proposals to the Roman General.

Following the high-crested centurion, who, summoned by the first sentinel that had challenged, offered to conduct him at once to the presence of Titus, the emissary, man of peace though he was, could not but admire the regularity of the encampment in which he found himself, and the discipline observed by those who occupied it. The line of tents was arranged with mathematical order and precision, forming a complete city of canvas, of which the principal street, so to speak, stretching in front of the tents occupied by the tribunes and other chief officers, was not less than a hundred feet wide. From this great thoroughfare all the others struck off at right angles, completing a simple figure, in which communication was unimpeded and confusion impossible, whilst an open space of some two hundred feet was preserved between the camp and the ramparts that encircled the whole. In this interval troops might parade, spoil and baggage be stored, or beasts of burden tethered, whilst its width afforded comparative security to those within from darts, firebrands, or other missiles of offence.

If Calchas had ever dreamed of the possibility that his countrymen would be able to make head against the Romans, he abandoned the idea now. As he followed his conductor through the long white streets in which the legions lay at rest, he could not but observe the efficient state of that army which no foe had ever yet been able to resist—he could not fail to be struck by the brightness of the arms, piled in exact symmetry before each tent; at the ready obedience and cheerful respect paid by the men to their officers, and at the abundant supplies of food and water, contrasting painfully with the hunger and thirst of the besieged. Line after line he traversed in silent wonder, and seemed no nearer the pavilion of the General than at first; and he could not conceal from himself that the enemy were no less formidable to the Jews in their numerical superiority than in discipline, organization, and all the advantages of war.

His conductor halted at length in front of a large canvas dome, opposite to which a strong guard of the Tenth Legion were resting on their arms. At a sign from the centurion two of these advanced like machines, and stood motionless one on each side of Calchas. Then the centurion

disappeared, to return presently with a tribune, who, after a short investigation of the emissary, bade him follow, and, lifting a curtain, Calchas found himself at once in the presence of the Roman Conqueror and his generals.

As the latter gave way on each side, the hero advanced a step and confronted the ambassador from the besieged. Titus, according to custom, was fully armed, and with his helmet on his head. The only luxury the hardy soldier allowed himself was in the adornment of his weapons, which were richly inlaid with gold. Many a time had he nearly paid the penalty of this warlike fancy with his life ; for, in the thick of the battle, who so conspicuous as the bold Prince in his golden armour ? Who such a prize, alive or dead, as the son of Vespasian, and heir to the sovereignty of the world ? He stood now, erect and dignified, a fitting representative of the mighty engine he wielded with such skill. His firm and well-knit frame wore its steel covering lightly and easily as a linen tunic. His noble features and manly bearing bore witness to the generous disposition and the fearless heart within ; and his gestures denoted that self-reliance and self-respect which spring from integrity and conscious power com-

bined. He looked every inch a soldier and a prince.

But there was a peculiarity in the countenance of Titus which added a nameless charm to his frank and handsome features. With all its manly daring, there was yet in the depths of those keen eyes a gleam of womanly compassion and tenderness, that emboldened a suppliant and reassured a prisoner. There was a softness in the unfrequent smile that could but belong to a kindly, guileless nature. It was the face of a man capable, not only of lofty deeds and daring exploits, but of gentle memories, loving thoughts, home affections, generosity, commiseration, and self-sacrifice.

Close behind the General, affording a striking contrast in every respect to his chief, stood the least trusted, but by no means the least efficient of his officers. Almost the first eye that Calchas met when he entered the tent was that of Julius Placidus, whose services to Vespasian, though never thoroughly understood, had been rewarded by a high command in the Roman army. The most right-thinking of Cæsars could not neglect the man whose energies had helped him to the throne; and Titus, though he saw through the character he thoroughly despised, was compelled

to do justice to the ready courage and soldierlike qualities of the Tribune. So Julius Placidus found himself placed in a position from which he could play his favourite game to advantage, and was still courting ambition as zealously as when he intrigued at Rome against Vitellius, and bargained with Hippias, over a cup of wine, for the murder of his Emperor.

That retired swordsman, too, was present in the tent; no longer the mere trainer of professional gladiators, but commanding a band that had made itself a name for daring at which the besieged grew pale, and which the Tenth Legion itself could hardly hope to emulate. After the assassination of the last Cæsar, this host of gladiators had formed themselves into a body of mercenaries, with Hippias at their head, and offered their services to the new Emperor. Under the ominous title of "The Lost Legion," these desperate men had distinguished themselves by entering on all such enterprises as promised an amount of danger to which it was hardly thought prudent to expose regular troops, and had gained unheard-of credit during the siege, which from its nature afforded them many opportunities for the display of wild and reckless courage. Their leader was con-

spicuous, even in the General's tent, by the lavish splendour of his arms and appointments; but, though his bearing was proud and martial as ever, his face had grown haggard and careworn, his beard was thickly sprinkled with grey. Hippias had played for the heaviest stakes of life boldly, and had won. He seemed to be little better off, and little better satisfied, than the losers in the great game.

Near him stood Licinius,—staid, placid, determined; the commander of the Tenth Legion; the favoured councillor of Titus; the pride of the whole army; having all the experiences, all the advantages, all the triumphs of life at his feet. Alas! knowing too well what they were worth. It was a crown of parsley men gave the young athlete who conquered in the Isthmian Games; and round the unwrinkled brows that parsley was precious as gold. Later in life the converse holds too true, and long before the hair turns grey, all earthly triumphs are but empty pageantry, all crowns but withered parsley at the best.

Titus, standing forward from amongst his officers, glanced with a look of pity at the worn, hungry face of the messenger. Privation, nay, famine, was beginning to do its work even on the

wealthiest of the besieged, and Calchas could not hide under his calm, dignified bearing, the lassitude and depression of physical want.

"The proposal is a fair one," said the Prince, turning to his assembled captains. "Two days' respite, and a free surrender of the city, with the simple condition that the holy places shall be respected, and the lives of the inhabitants spared. These Jews may do me the justice to remember that my wish throughout the war has ever been to avoid unnecessary bloodshed, and had they treated me with more confidence, I would long ago have shown them how truly I respected their Temple and their faith. It is not too late now. Nevertheless, illustrious friends, I called you not together so soon after cock-crow,* for a council of war, without intending to avail myself of your advice. I hold in my hand a proposal from Eleazar, an influential patrician, as it appears, in the city, to deliver up the keys of the Great Gate, within forty-eight hours, provided I will pledge him my word to preserve his Temple from demolition, and his countrymen from slaughter: provided also, that the Roman army abstain during that time from

* The first call of the Roman trumpets in camp, about two hours before dawn, was distinguished by that name.

all offensive measures, whatever preparations for resistance they may observe upon the walls. He further states that the city contains a large party of desperate men, who are opposed to all terms of capitulation, and that he must labour during these two days, to coerce some, and cajole others to his own opinion. It is a fair proposal enough, I repeat. The Tenth Legion is the first in seniority as in fame—I call upon its commander for his opinion.”

Licinius, thus appealed to, earnestly advised that any terms which might put an end to the loss of life on both sides, should be entertained from motives of policy as well as humanity. “I speak not,” said the General, “for myself or my legion. Our discipline is unshaken, our supplies are regular, our men have been inured by long campaigning to a Syrian climate and a Syrian sun. We have lost comparatively few, from hardships or disease. But no commander knows better than Titus, how an army in the field melts by the mere influence of time, and the difference that a few weeks can make in its efficiency and numerical strength is the difference between victory and defeat. Other divisions have not been so fortunate as my own. I will put it to the leader of

the Lost Legion, how many men he could march to-day to the assault?"

Hippias stroked his beard gravely, and shook his head.

"Had I been asked the question five days ago," said he, frankly, "I could have answered, a thousand. Had I been asked it yesterday, seven hundred. Great prince, at noon, to-day, I must be content to muster five hundred swordsmen. Nevertheless," he added, with something of his old abrupt manner, "not one of them but claims his privilege of leading the other cohorts to the breach!"

It was too true that the influence of climate, acting upon men disposed to intemperance in pleasure, added to the severity of their peculiar service, had reduced the original number of the gladiators by one half. The remnant, however, were still actuated like their commander, by the fierce, reckless spirit of the amphitheatre.

Titus, looking from one to the other, pondered for a few moments in earnest thought, and Placidus, seizing the opportunity, broke in with his smooth, courteous tones.

"It is not for me," said he, "to differ with such illustrious leaders as those who have just spoken.

The empire has long acknowledged Licinius as one of her bravest commanders; and Hippias the gladiator lives but in his natural element of war. Still, my first duty is to Cæsar and to Rome. Great prince, when a short while ago you bade a noble Jewish captive address his countrymen on the wall, what was the result? They knew him to be a patrician of their oldest blood, and, I believe, a priest also of their own superstitions. They had proved him a skilful general, and I myself speak of him without rancour, though he foiled me before Jotapata. Till taken prisoner by Vespasian Cæsar, he had been their staunchest patriot, and their boldest leader. When he addressed them, notwithstanding the length of his appeal, they had no reason but to believe him sincere. And what, I say, was the result? A few hours gained for resistance. A fiercer defiance flung at Rome, a more savage cruelty displayed towards her troops. I would not trust them, prince. This very proposal may be but a stratagem to gain time. The attack of yesterday, covered by my cavalry, must have shaken them shrewdly. Probably their stores are exhausted. The very phalanx that opposed us so stubbornly, looked gaunt and grim as wolves. Observe this

very emissary from the most powerful man in Jerusalem. Is there not famine in his hollow cheeks and sunken eyes? Give him to eat. See how his visage brightens at the very name of food! Give him to eat, now, in presence of the council of war, and judge by his avidity, of the privations he has endured behind the walls."

"Hold!" exclaimed Titus, indignantly. "Hold, Tribune, and learn, if you have one generous feeling left, to respect misfortune, most of all when you behold it in the person of your enemy. This venerable man shall indeed be supplied with wine and food; but he shall not be insulted in my camp, by feeling that his sufferings are gauged as the test of his truth. Licinius, my old and trusty counsellor, my very instructor in the art of war, I confide him to your care. Take him with you to your tent, see that he wants for nothing. I need not remind *you* to treat an enemy with all the kindness and courtesy compatible with the caution of a soldier. But you must not lose sight of him for a moment, and you will send him back with my answer under a strong guard to the chief gate of Jerusalem. I will have no underhand dealings with this unhappy people, though much

I fear my duty to my father and the empire will not permit me to grant them the interval of repose that they desire. This is for my consideration. I have taken your opinions, for which I thank you. I reserve to myself the option of being guided by them. Friends and comrades, you are dismissed. Let this man be forthcoming in an hour, to take my answer back to those who sent him. *Vale!*"

"*Vale!*" repeated each officer, as he bowed and passed out of the tent.

Hippias and Placidus lingered somewhat behind the rest, and halting when out of hearing of the sentinel who guarded the Eagles planted before the commander's quarters, or prætorium, as it was called, looked in each other's faces, and laughed.

"You put it pointedly," said the former, "and took an ugly thrust in return. Nevertheless, the assault will be delayed after all, and my poor harmless lambs will scarce muster in enough force to be permitted to lead the attack."

"Fear not," replied the Tribune; "it will take place to-morrow. It would suit neither your game nor mine, my Hippias, to make a peaceable entry by the Great Gate, march in order of battle

to the Temple, and satisfy ourselves with a stare at its flashing, golden roof. I can hardly stave off my creditors. You can scarce pay your men. Had it not been for the prospect of sacking the Holy Place, neither of us would have been to-day under a heavy breastplate in this scorching sun. And we *shall* sack it, I tell you, never fear."

"You think so?" said the other, doubtfully. "And yet the prince spoke very sternly, as if he not only differed with you, but disapproved of your counsel. I am glad I was not in your place; I should have been tempted to answer even the son of Vespasian."

The Tribune laughed gaily once more. "Trifles," said he. "I have the hide of a rhinoceros when it is but a question of looks and words, however stern and biting they may be. Besides, do you not yet know this cub of the old lion? The royal beast is always the same, dangerous when his hair is rubbed the wrong way. Titus was only angry because his better judgment opposed his inclinations, and agreed with me—me to whom he pays the compliment of his dislike. I tell you we shall give the assault before two days are out, with my cohort swarming on the flanks, and thy

Lost Legion, my Hippias, maddening to the front. So now for a draught of wine and a robe of linen, even though it be under one of these suffocating tents. I think when once the siege is over and the place taken, I shall never buckle on a breastplate again."



CHAPTER V.

GLAD TIDINGS.

THE eye of Calchas did indeed brighten, and his colour went and came when food was placed before him in the Roman General's tent. It was with a strong effort that he controlled and stifled the cravings of hunger, never so painful as when the body has been brought down by slow degrees to exist on the smallest possible quantity of nourishment. It was long since a full meal had been spread even on Eleazar's table; and the sufferings from famine of the poorer classes in Jerusalem, had reached a pitch unheard-of in the history of nations. Licinius could not but admire the self-control with which his guest partook of his hospitality. The old man was resolved not to betray, in his own person, the straits of the besieged. It

was a staunch and soldier-like sentiment, to which the Roman was keenly alive, and Licinius turned his back upon his charge, affecting to give long directions to some of his centurions from the tent-door, in order to afford Calchas the opportunity of satisfying his hunger unobserved.

After a while, the General seated himself inside, courteously desiring his guest to do the same. A decurion with his spearmen, stood at the entrance, under the standard where the Eagles of the Tenth Legion hovered over his shining crest. The sun was blazing fiercely down on the white lines of canvas that stretched in long perspective on every side, and flashing back at stated intervals from shield, and helm, and breastplate, piled in exact array at each tent-door. It was too early in the year for the crackling locust; and every trace of life, as of vegetation, had disappeared from the parched surface of the soil, burnished and slippery with the intense heat. It was an hour of lassitude and repose even in the beleaguering camp, and scarce a sound broke the drowsy stillness of noon, save the stamp and snort of a tethered steed, or the scream of an ill-tempered mule. Scorched without, and stifled within, even the well-disciplined legionary loathed his canvas shelter, longing, yearning

vainly in his day-dreams for the breeze of cool Præneste, and the shades of darkling Tibur, and the north-wind blowing through the holm-oaks, off the crest of the snowy Apennines.

In the General's pavilion the awning had been raised a cubit from the ground, to admit what little air there was, so faint as scarce to stir the fringe upon his tunic. Against the pole that propped the soldier's home, rested a mule's pack-saddle, and a spare breastplate. On the wooden frame which served him for a bed, lay the General's tablets, and a sketch of the Tower of Antonia. A simple earthenware dish contained the food offered to his guest, and, like the coarse clay vessel into which a wine-skin had been poured, was nearly empty.

Licinius sat with his helmet off, but otherwise completely armed. Calchas, robed in his long, dark mantle, fixed his mild eye steadily on his host. The man of war and the man of peace seemed to have some engrossing thought, some all-important interest in common.

For a while they conversed on light and trivial topics, the discipline of the camp, the fertility of Syria, the distance from Rome, and the different regions in which her armies fought and conquered.

Then Licinius broke through his reserve, and spoke out freely to his guest.

"You have a hero," said the Roman, "in your ranks, of whom I would fain learn something, loving him as I do like a son. Our men call him the Yellow Hostage; and there is not a warrior among all the brave champions of Jerusalem, whom they regard with such admiration and dread. I myself saw him but yesterday save your whole army from destruction beneath the walls."

"It is Esca!" exclaimed Calchas. "Esca, once a chief in Britain, and afterwards your slave in Rome."

"The same," answered Licinius; "and though a slave, the noblest and the bravest of men. A chief, you say, in Britain. What know you of him? He never told me who he was, or whence he came."

"I know him," replied Calchas; "as one who lives with us like a kinsman, who takes his share of hardship, and far more than his share of danger, as though he were a very chief in Israel. Who is to me, indeed, and those dearest to me, far more precious than a son. We escaped together from Rome—my brother, my brother's child, and this young Briton. Many a night on the smooth

Ægean has he told me of his infancy, his youth, his manhood, the defence his people made against your soldiers, the cruel stratagems by which they were foiled and overcome, how nobly he himself had braved the legions; and yet how the first lessons he learned in childhood, were to feel kindly for the invader, how the first accents his mother taught him, were in the Roman tongue."

"It is strange," observed Licinius, musing deeply, and answering, as it seemed, his own thought. "Strange lesson for one of that nation to learn. Strange, too, that fate seems to have posted him continually in arms against the conqueror."

"They were his mother's lessons," resumed Calchas; "and that mother he has not forgotten even to-day. He loves to speak of her as though she could see him still. And who shall say she cannot? He loves to tell of her stately form, her fond eyes, and her gentle brow, with its lines of thought and care. He says she had some deep sorrow in her youth, which her child suspected, but of which she never spoke. It taught her to be kind and patient with all; it made her none the less loving for her boy. Ay, 'tis the

same tale in every nation and under every sky. The garment has not yet been woven in which the black hank of sin and sorrow does not cross and recross throughout the whole web. She had her burden to bear, and so has Esca, and so hast thou, great Roman commander, one of the conquerors of the earth; and so have I, but I know where to lay mine down, and rest in peace."

"They are a noble race, these women of Britain," said Licinius, following out the thread of his own thoughts with a heavy heart, on which one of them had impressed her image so deeply, that while it beat, a memory would reign there, as it had reigned already for years, undisturbed by a living rival. "And so the boy loves to talk of his childhood, and his lost mother—lost," he added, bitterly, "surely lost, because so loved!"

"Even so," replied Calchas; "and deep as was the child's grief, it carried a sharper sting from the manner of her death. Too young to bear arms, he had seen his father hurry away at the head of his tribe to meet the Roman legions. His father, a fierce, imperious warrior, of whom he knew but little, and whom he would have dreaded rather than loved, had the boy feared anything on earth. His mother lay on a bed of sickness; and

even the child felt a nameless fear on her account, that forbade him to leave her side. With pain and difficulty they moved her on her litter to a fastness in their deep, tangled forests, where the Britons made a last stand. Then certain long-bearded priests took him by force from his mother's side, and hid him away in a cavern, because he was a chief's son. He can recall now the pale face and the loving eyes, turned on him in a last look, as he was borne off struggling and fighting like a young wolf-cub. From his cavern he heard plainly the shouts of battle and the very clash of steel; but he heeded them not for a vague and sickening dread had come over him that he should see his mother no more. It was even so. They hurried the child from his refuge by night. They never halted till the sun had risen and set again. Then they spoke to him with kind, soothing words; but when he turned from them, and called for his mother, they told him she was dead. They had not even paid her the last tribute of respect. While they closed her eyes, the legions had already forced their rude defences; her few attendants fled for their lives, and the high-born Guenebra was left in the lonely hut wherein she died, to the mercy of the conquerors."

When Calchas ceased speaking, he saw that his listener had turned ghastly pale, and that the sweat was standing on his brow. His strong frame, too, shook till his armour rattled. He rose and crossed to the tent-door as if for air, then turned to his guest, and spoke in a low but steady voice :—

“I knew it,” said he—“I knew it must be so ; this Esca is the son of one whom I met in my youth, and why should I be ashamed to confess it ? whose influence has pervaded my whole life. I am old and grey now. Look at me ; what have such as I to do with the foolish hopes and fears that quicken the young fresh heart, and flush the unwrinkled cheek ? But now, to-day, I tell thee, war-worn and saddened as I am, it seems to me that the cup of life has been but offered, and dashed cruelly away ere it had so much as cooled my thirsty lips. Why should I have known happiness, only to be mocked by its want ? What ! thou hast a human heart ? Thou art a brave man, too, though thy robes denote a vocation of peace, else thou hadst not been here to-day in the heart of an enemy’s camp. Need I tell thee, that when I entered that rude hut in the Briton’s stronghold, and saw all I loved on

earth stretched cold and inanimate on her litter at my feet, had I not been a soldier of Rome my own good sword had been my consolation, and I had fallen by her there, to be laid in the same grave ; and now I shall never see her more !” He passed his hand across his face, and added, in a broken whisper, “Never more ! never more !”

“You cannot think so. You cannot believe in such utter desolation,” exclaimed Calchas, roused like some old war-horse by the trumpet-sound, as he saw the task assigned him, and recognized yet another traveller on the great road whom he could guide home.

“Do you think that you, or she, or any one of us, were made to suffer, and to cause others suffering—to strive and fail, and long and sorrow, for a little while, only to drop into the grave at last, like an over-ripe fig from its branch, and be forgotten ? Do you think that life is to end for you or for me, when the one falls in his armour at the head of the Tenth Legion, pierced by a Jewish javelin, or the other is crucified before the walls for a spy by Titus, or stoned in the gate for a traitor by his own countrymen ? And this is the fate which may await us both before to-morrow’s

sun is set. Believe it not, noble Roman! That frame of yours is no more Licinius than is the battered breastplate yonder on the ground which you have cast aside, because it is no longer proof against sword and spear; the man himself leaves his worn-out robe behind, and goes rejoicing on his journey—the journey that is to lead him to his home elsewhere.”

“And where?” asked the Roman, interested by the earnestness of his guest, and the evident conviction with which he spoke. “Is it the home to which, as our own poets have said, good Æneas, and Tullus, and Ancus have gone before? the home of which some philosophers have dreamed, and at which others laugh?—a phantom-land, a fleeting pageant, impalpable plains beyond a shadowy river? These are but dreams, the idle visions of men of thought. What have we, who are the men of action, to do with aught but reality?”

“And what is reality?” replied Calchas. “Is it without or within? Look from your own tent-door, noble Roman, and behold the glorious array that meet your eye—the even camp, the crested legionaries, the eagles, the trophies, and the piles of arms. Beyond, the towers and pinnacles of

Jerusalem, and the white dome of the Temple with its dazzling roof of gold. Far away, the purple hills of Moab looking over the plains of the Dead Sea. It is a world of beautiful reality. There cometh a flash from a thunder-cloud, or an arrow off the wall, and your life is spared, but your eyesight is gone; which is the reality now? the light or the darkness? the wide expanse of glittering sunshine, or the smarting pain and the black night within? So is it with life and death. Titus in his golden armour, Vespasian on the throne of the Cæsars, that stalwart soldier leaning yonder on his spear, or the wasted captive dying for hunger in the town—are they beings of the same kind? and why are their shares so unequal in the common lot? Because it matters so little what may be the different illusions that deceive us now, when all may attain equally to the same reality at last.”

Licinius pondered for a few minutes ere he replied. Like many another thinking heathen, he had often speculated on the great question which forces itself at times on every reflective being, “Why are these things so?” He, too, had been struck ere now with the obvious discrepancy between man’s aspirations and his efforts—the un-

accountable caprices of fortune, the apparent injustice of fate. He had begun life in the bold confidence of an energetic character, believing all things possible to the resolute strength and courage of manhood. When he failed, he blamed himself with something of contempt; when he succeeded, he gathered fresh confidence in his own powers, and in the truth of his theories. But in the pride of youth and happiness, sorrow took him by the hand and taught him the bitter lesson that it is good to learn early rather than late; because until the plough has passed over it, there can be no real fertility, no healthy produce on the untilled soil. The deeper they are scored, the heavier is the harvest from these furrows of the heart. Licinius, in the prime of life and on the pinnacle of success, became a thoughtful, because a lonely and disappointed, man. He saw the complications around him; he acknowledged his inability to comprehend them. While others thought him so strong and self-reliant, he knew his own weakness and his own need; the broken spirit was humble and docile as a child's.

"There must be a *reason* for everything," he exclaimed at last; "there must be a clue in the labyrinth, if a man's hand could only find it!

What *is* truth ? say our philosophers. Oh ! that I did but know !”

Then, in the warlike tent, in the heart of the conquering army, the Jew imparted to the Roman that precious wisdom to which all other learning is but an entrance and a path. Under the very shadow of the Eagles that were gathered to devastate his city, the man to whom all vicissitudes were alike, to whom all was good because he *knew* “ what was truth,” showed to his brother, whose sword was even then sharpened for the destruction of his people, that talisman which gave him the mastery over all created things ; which made him superior to hunger and thirst, pain and sorrow, insult, dishonour, and death. It is something, even in this world, to wear a suit of impenetrable armour, such as is provided for the weakest and the lowest who enter the service that requires so little and that grants so much. Licinius listened eagerly, greedily, as a blind man would listen to one who taught him how to recover his sight. Gladdening was the certainty of a future to one who had hitherto lived so mournfully in the past. Fresh and beautiful was the rising edifice of hope to one whose eye was dull with looking on the grey ruins of regret. There

was comfort for him, there was encouragement, there was example. When Calchas told in simple earnest words all that he himself had heard and seen of glorious self-sacrifice, of infinite compassion, and of priceless ransom, the soldier's knee was bent, and his eyes were wet with tears.

By the orders of his commander, Licinius conducted his guest back to the Great Gate of Jerusalem with all the customary honours paid to an ambassador from a hostile power. He bore the answer of Titus, granting to the besieged the respite they desired. Placidus had been so far right that the Prince's better judgment condemned the ill-timed reprieve: but in this, as in many other instances, Titus suffered his clemency to prevail over his experience in Jewish duplicity, and his anxiety to terminate the war.



CHAPTER VI.

WINE ON THE LEES.

THE commander of the Lost Legion, when he parted with Placidus after the council of war, retired moodily to his tent. He, too, was disappointed and dissatisfied, wearied with the length of the siege, harassed and uneasy about the ravages made by sickness among his men, and anxious moreover as to his share of the spoil. Hippias, it is needless to say, was lavish in his expenses, and luxurious in his personal habits: like the mercenaries he commanded, he looked to the sacking of Jerusalem as a means of paying his creditors, and supplying him with money for future excesses. Not a man of the Lost Legion but had already calculated the worth of that golden roof, to which they looked so longingly, and his own probable

portion when it was melted into coin. Rumour, too, had not failed to multiply by tens the amount of wealth stored in the Temple, and the jewels it contained. The besiegers were persuaded that every soldier who should be fortunate enough to enter it sword in hand, would be enriched for life; and the gladiators were the last men to grudge danger or bloodshed for such an object.

But there is a foe who smites an army far more surely than the enemy that meets it face to face in the field. Like the angel who breathed on the host of the Assyrians in the night, so that when the Jews rose in the morning, their adversaries were "all dead men," this foe takes his prey by scores as they sleep in their tents, or pace to and fro watching under their armour in the sun. His name is Pestilence; and wherever man meets man for mutual destruction, he hovers over the opposing multitudes, and secures the lion's share of both.

Partly from their previous habits, partly from their looser discipline, he had been busier amongst the gladiators than in any other quarter of the camp. Dwindling day by day in numbers and efficiency, Hippias began to fear that they would be unable to take the prominent part he had pro-

mised them in the assault, and the chance of such a disappointment was irritating enough ; but when to this grievance was added the proposal he had just heard, for the peaceful surrender of the city,—a proposal which Titus seemed to regard with favourable eyes, and which would entail the distribution in equal portions of whatever treasure was considered the spoil of the army, so that the gladiator and legionary should but share alike,—the contingency was nothing less than maddening. He had given Titus a true report of his legion in council ; for Hippias was not a man to take shelter in falsehood under any pressure of necessity, but he repented, nevertheless, of his frankness ; and cursing the hour when he embarked for Syria, began to think of Rome with regret, and to believe that he was happier and more prosperous in the amphitheatre after all.

Passing amongst the tents of his men, he was distressed to meet old Hirpinus, who reported to him that another score had been stricken by the sickness since watch-setting the previous night. Every day was of the utmost importance now, and here were two more to be wasted in negotiations, even if the assault should be ordered to take place after all. The reflection did not serve

to soothe him, and Hippias entered his own tent with a fevered frame, and a frown of ill-omen on his brow.

For a soldier it was indeed a luxurious home ; adorned with trophies of arms, costly shawls, gold and silver drinking-vessels, and other valuables scattered about. There was even a porcelain vase filled with fresh flowers standing between two wine-skins ; and a burnished mirror, with a delicate comb resting against its stand, denoted either an extraordinary care for his personal appearance in the owner, or a woman's presence behind the crimson curtain which served to screen another compartment of the tent. Kicking the mirror out of his way, and flinging himself on a couch covered with a dressed leopard-skin, Hippias set his heavy head-piece on the ground, and called angrily for a cup of wine. At the second summons, the curtain was drawn aside, and a woman appeared from behind its folds.

Pale, haughty, and self-possessed, tameless and defiant even in her degradation, Valeria, though fallen, seemed to rise superior to herself, and stood before the man whom she had never loved, and yet to whom, in a moment of madness, she had sacrificed her whole existence, with the calm,

quiet demeanour of a mistress in the presence of her slave.

Her beauty had not faded ; far from it, though changed somewhat in its character, growing harder and colder than of old. If less womanly, it was of a deeper and loftier kind. The eyes, indeed, had lost the loving, laughing look which had once been their greatest charm, but they were keen and dazzling still ; while the other features, like the shapely figure, had gained a severe and majestic dignity in exchange for the flowing outlines and the round comeliness of youth. She was dressed sumptuously, and with an affectation of Eastern habits that suited her beauty well. Alas ! that beauty was her only weapon left ; and although she had turned it against herself, a true woman to the end, she had kept it bright and pointed still.

When Valeria left her home to follow the fortunes of a gladiator, she had not even the excuse of blindness for her folly. She knew that she was abandoning friends, fortune, position,—all the advantages of life for that which she did not care to have. She believed herself to be utterly desperate, depraved, and unsexed. It was her punishment that she could not rid herself of her

woman's nature, nor stifle the voice that no woman ever *can* stifle in her heart.

For a time, perhaps, the change of scene, the voyage, the excitement of the step she had taken, the determination to abide by her choice and defy everything, served to deaden her mind to her own misery. It was her whim to assume on occasions the arms and accoutrements of a gladiator ; and it was even said in the Lost Legion, that she had fought in their ranks more than once in some of their desperate enterprises against the town. It was certain that she never appeared abroad in the female dress she wore within her tent : Titus, indeed, would have scarcely failed to notice such a flagrant breach of camp-discipline ; and many a fierce swordsman whispered to his comrade, with a thrill of interest, that in a force like theirs she might mingle unnoticed in their ranks, and be with them at any time. It was but a whisper, though, after all, for they knew their commander too well to canvass his conduct openly, or to pry into matters he chose to keep secret.

These outbreaks, however, so contrary to all the impulses and instincts of a woman's nature, soon palled on the high-born Roman lady ; and as the siege with its various fortunes was pro-

tracted from day to day, the yoke under which she had voluntarily placed her proud white neck became too galling to endure. She hated the long glistening line of tents ; she hated the scorching Syrian sky, the flash of armour, the tramp of men, the constant trumpet-calls, the eternal guard-mounting, the wearisome and monotonous routine of a camp. She hated the hot tent, with its stifling atmosphere and its narrow space ; above all, she was learning daily to hate the man with whom she shared its shelter and its inconveniences.

She handed him the wine he asked for without a word, and standing there in her cold, scornful beauty, never noticed him by look or gesture. She seemed miles away in thought, and utterly unconscious of his presence.

He remembered when it was so different. He remembered how, even when first he knew her, his arrival used to call a smile of pleasure to her lips, a glance of welcome to her eye. It might be only on the surface, but still it was there ; and he felt for his own part, that as far as he had ever cared for any woman, he had cared for *her*. It was galling, truly, this indifference, this contempt. He was hurt, and his fierce undisciplined nature urged him to strike again.

He emptied the cup, and flung it from him with an angry jerk. The golden vessel rolled out from under the hangings of the tent; she made no offer to pick it up and fetch it back.

He glared fiercely into her eyes, and they met his own with the steady scornful gaze he almost feared, for that cold look chilled him to the very heart. The man was hardened, depraved, steeped to the lips in cruelty and crime; but there was a defenceless place in him still that she could stab when she liked, for he would have loved her if she had let him.

"I am very weary of the siege," said he, stretching his limbs on the couch with affected indifference,—“weary of the daily drudgery, the endless consultations, the scorching climate, above all, this suffocating atmosphere, where a man can hardly breathe. Would that I had never seen this accursed tent, or aught that it contains!”

“You cannot be more weary of it than I am,” she replied, in the same contemptuous, quiet tone that maddened him.

“Why did you come?” he retorted with a bitter laugh. “Nobody wanted such a delicate, dainty lady in a soldier’s tent—and certainly nobody ever asked you to share it with him!”

She gave a little gasp as though something touched her to the quick, but recovered herself on the instant, and answered calmly and scornfully, "It is kindly said, and generously, considering all things. Just what I might have expected from a gladiator!"

"There was a time you liked 'The Family' well enough!" he exclaimed, angrily, and then softened by his own recollections of that time, added in a milder tone:

"Valeria, why will you thus quarrel with me? It used not to be so when I brought the foils and dumb-bells to your portico, and spared no pains to make you the deadliest fencer, as you were the fairest, in Rome. Those were happy days enough, and so might these be, if you had but a grain of common sense. Can you not see when you and I fall out, who must necessarily be the loser? What have you to depend on now but *me*?"

He should have stopped at his tender recollections. Argument, especially if it has any show of reason in it, is to an angry woman but as the *bandillero's* goad to the Iberian bull. Its flutter serves to irritate rather than to scare, and the deeper its pointed steel sinks in, the more actively indeed does the recipient swerve aside, but returns the more rapidly and the more obstinately to the

charge. Of all considerations, that which most maddened Valeria, and rendered her utterly reckless, was that she should be dependant on a gladiator.

The cold eyes flashed fire; but she would not give him the advantage over her of acknowledging that he could put her in a passion, so she restrained herself, though her heart was ready to burst. Had she cared for him she might have stabbed him to death in such a mood.

"I thank you for reminding me," she answered, bitterly. "It is not strange that one of the Mutian line should occasionally forget her duty to Hippias, the retired prize-fighter. A *patrician*, perhaps, would have brought it more delicately to her remembrance; but I have no right to blame the fencing-master for his plebeian birth and bringing up."

"Now, by the body of Hercules, this is too much!" he exclaimed, springing erect on the couch, and grinding his teeth with rage. "What? *you tax me with my birth! You' scout me for my want of mincing manners and white hands, and syllables that drop like slobbered wine from the close-shaven lip! You, the dainty lady, the celebrated beauty, the admired, forsooth, of all*

admirers, whose porch was choked with gilded chariots, whose litter was thronged with every curly-headed, white-shouldered, crimson-cloaked, young *Narcissus* in Rome, and yet who sought her chosen lovers in the amphitheatre—who scanned with judicious eye the points and the vigour, and the promise of naked athletes; and could find at last none to serve her turn, but war-worn old Hippias, the roughest and the rudest, and the worst-favoured, but the strongest, nevertheless, amongst them all.”

The storm was gathering apace, but she still tried hard to keep it down. An experienced mariner might have known by the short-coming breath, the white cheek, and the dilated nostril, that it was high time to shorten sail, and run for shelter before the squall.

“It was indeed a strange taste,” she retorted. “None can marvel at it more than myself.”

“Not so strange as you think,” he burst out, somewhat inconsistently. “Do not fancy *you* were the only lady in Rome, who was proud to be admired by Hippias the gladiator. I tell you I had my choice amongst a hundred, maids and matrons, nobler born, fairer, ay, and of better repute than yourself! Any one of whom would have been

glad to be here to-day in your place. I was a fool for my pains ; but I thought you were the fittest to bear the toil of campaigning, and the least able to do without me, so I took you, more out of pity than of love !”

“Coward !” she hissed between her clenched teeth. “Traitor and fool, too ! Must you know the truth at last ? Must you know what I have spared you this long time ? what alone has kept me from sinking under the weight of these weary days with their hourly degradation ? what has been disease and remedy, wound and balm, bitterest punishment, and yet dearest consolation ? Take it then, since have it you *will* ! Can you think that such as I could ever love such as *you* ? Can you believe you could be more to Valeria than the handle of the blade, the shaft of the javelin, the cord of the bow, by which she could inflict a grievous wound in another’s bosom ? Listen ! When you wooed me, I was a scorned, an insulted, a desperate woman. I loved one who was nobler, handsomer, better. Ay, you pride yourself on your fierce courage and your brutal strength ; I tell you who was twice as strong, and a thousand times as brave as the best of you. I loved him, do you hear ? as men like you never

can be loved—with an utter and entire devotion, that asked but to sacrifice itself without hope of a return, and he scorned me, not as *you* would have done, with a rough brutal frankness that had taken away half the pain, but so kindly, so delicately, so generously, that even while I clung to him, and he turned away from me, I felt he was dearer than ever to my heart. Ay, you may sit there and look at me with your eyes glaring and your beard bristling, like some savage beast of prey; but you brought it on yourself, and if you killed me I would not spare you now. I had never *looked* at you but for your hired skill, which you imparted to the man I loved. I took you because he scorned me, as I would have taken one of my Liburnians, had I thought it would have wounded him deeper, or made him hate me more. You are a fencer, I believe—one who prides himself on his skill in feints and parries, in giving and taking, in judging accurately of the adversary's strength and weakness at a glance. Have I foiled you to some purpose? You thought you were the darling of the high-born lady, the favourite of her fancy, the minion to whom she could refuse nothing, not even her fair fame, and she was using you all the time as a mere rod with which to

smite a slave ! *A slave*, do you hear ? Yes. The man I preferred not only to you, but to a host of your betters ; the man I loved so dearly, and love so madly still, is but your pupil Esca, a barbarian, and a slave !”

Her anger had supported her till now, but with Esca’s name came a flood of tears, and thoroughly unstrung, she sat down on the ground and wept passionately, covering her face with her hands.

He could have almost found it in his heart to strike her, but for her defenceless attitude, so exasperated was he, so maddened by the torrent of her words. He could think of nothing, however, more bitter than to taunt her with her helplessness, whilst under his charge.

“Your minion,” said he, “is within the walls at this moment. From that tent door, you might almost see him on the rampart, if he be not skulking from his duty like a slave as he is. Think, proud lady, you who are so ready, asked or unasked, for slave or gladiator, you need but walk five hundred paces to be in his arms. Surely, if they knew your mission, Roman guards and Jewish sentries would lower their spears to you as you passed ! Enough of this ! Remember who and what you are. Above all, remember *where* you

are, and how you came here. I have forborne too long, my patience is exhausted at last. You are in a soldier's tent, and you must learn a soldier's duty—unquestioning obedience. Go! pick up that goblet I let fall just now. Fill it, and bring it me here, without a word!"

Somewhat to his surprise, she rose at once to do his bidding, leaving the tent with a perfectly composed step and air. He might have remarked though, that when she returned with his wine, the red drops fell profusely over her white trembling fingers, though she looked in his face as proudly and steadily as ever. The hand might, indeed, shake, but the heart was fixed and resolute. In the veins of none of her ancestors did the Mutian blood, so strong for good and evil, ebb and flow with a fuller, more resistless tide, than in hers. Valeria had made up her mind in the space of time it took to lift a goblet from the ground.



CHAPTER VII.

THE ATTAINDER

JOHN of Gischala would never have obtained the ascendancy he enjoyed in Jerusalem, had he not been as well versed in the sinuous arts of intrigue, as in the simpler stratagems of war. After confronting his rival in the council, and sustaining in public opinion the worst of the encounter, he was more than ever impressed with the necessity of ruining Eleazar at any price; therefore, keeping a wary eye upon all the movements of the Zealots, he held himself ready at every moment to take advantage of the first false step on the part of his adversary.

Eleazar, with the promptitude natural to his character, had commenced a repair of the defences, almost before his emissary was admitted to the Roman camp, thinking it needless to await the

decision of Titus, either for or against his proposal. Labouring heart and soul, at the works, with all the available force he could muster, he left John and his party in charge of the Great Gate, and it happened that his rival was present there in person, when Calchas was brought back to the city by the Roman guard-of-honour Titus had ordered for his safe-conduct,—a compliment his brother never expected, and far less desired. Eleazar made sure his messenger would be permitted to return the way he came, and that his own communications with the enemy would remain a secret from the besieged.

John saw his opportunity, and availed himself of it on the instant. No sooner had Calchas placed his foot once more within the town, than his head was covered, so that he might not be recognized; and he was carried off by a guard of John's adherents, and placed in secure ward, their chief adroitly arresting him by a false name, for the information of the populace, lest the rumour should reach Eleazar's ears. He knew his rival's readiness of resource, and determined to take him by surprise.

Then he rent his garment, and ran bareheaded through the streets towards the Temple, calling

with a great voice, "Treason! Treason!" and sending round the fragments of his gown amongst the senators, to convoke them in haste upon a matter of life and death, in their usual place of deliberation. So rapidly did he take his measures that the Outer Court was already filled, and the Council assembled, ere Eleazar, busied with his labours at the wall far off, opposite the Tower of Antonia, knew that they had been summoned. Covered with sweat and dust, he obeyed at once the behest of the Levite who came breathlessly to require his presence, as an elder of Israel; but it was not without foreboding of evil, that he observed the glances of suspicion and mistrust shot at him by his colleagues when he joined them. John of Gischala, with an affectation of extreme fairness, had declined to enter upon the business of the State, until this, the latest of her councillors had arrived; but he had taken good care by means of his creatures, to scatter rumours amongst the Senate, and even amongst the Zealots themselves, deeply affecting the loyalty of their chief.

No sooner had Eleazar, still covered with the signs of his toil, taken his accustomed station, than John stood forth in the hall and spoke out in a loud, clear voice.

"Before the late troublous times," said he, "and when every man in Judæa ate of his own figs from his own fig-tree, and trod out his own grapes in his own vineyard; when we digged our wells unmolested, and our women drew water unveiled, and drank it peacefully at sun-down; when our children played about our knees at the door, and ate butter and honey, and cakes baked in oil; when the cruse was never empty, and the milk mantled in the milking-vessels, and the kid seethed in the pot;—yea, in the pleasant time, in the days of old, it chanced that I was taking a prey in the mountain, by the hunter's craft, in the green mountain, even the mountain of Lebanon. Then at noon I was wearied and athirst, and I laid me down under a goodly cedar and slept, and dreamed a dream. Behold, I will discover to the Elders my dream and the interpretation thereof.

"Now the cedar under which I lay was a goodly cedar, but in my dream it seemed that it reached far into the heavens, and spread its roots abroad to the springs of many waters, and sheltered the birds of the air in its branches, and comforted the beasts of the field with its shade. Then there came a beast out of the mountain—a huge beast with a serpent between its eyes and horns upon

its jaws—and leaned against the cedar, but the tree neither bent nor broke. So there came a great wind against the cedar—a mighty wind that rushed and roared through its branches, till it rocked to and fro, bending and swaying to the blast—but the storm passed away, and the goodly tree stood firm and upright as before. Again the face of heaven was darkened, and the thunder roared above, and the lightning leaped from the cloud, and smote upon the cedar, and rent off one of its limbs with a great and terrible crash; but when the sky cleared once more, the tree was a fair tree yet. So I said in my dream, ‘Blessed is the cedar among the trees of the forest, for destruction shall not prevail against it.’

“Then I looked, and behold, the cedar was already rotting, and its arms were withered up, and its head was no longer black, for a little worm, and another, and yet another were creeping from within the bark, where they had been eating at its heart. Then one drew near bearing faggots on his shoulders, and he builded the faggots round the tree, and set a light to them, and burned them with fire, and the worms fell out by myriads from the tree, and perished in the smoke.

“Then said he unto me, ‘John of Gischala, arise! The cedar is the Holy City, and the beast is the might of the Roman empire, and the storm and the tempest are the famine and the pestilence, and none of these shall prevail against it, save by the aid of the enemies from within. Purge them therefore with fire, and smite them with the sword, and crush them, even as the worm is crushed beneath thy heel into the earth!’

“And the interpretation of the dream hath remained with me to this day, for is it not thus even now when the Roman is at the gate, as it hath ever been with the Holy City in the times of old?

“When the Assyrian came up against her, was not his host greater in number than the sands of the sea-shore? But he retired in discomfiture from before her, because she was true to herself. Would Nebuzar-adan have put his chains on our people’s neck, had Gedaliah scorned to accept honour from the conqueror, and to pay him tribute? When Pompey pitched his camp at Jericho and surrounded the Holy City with his legions, did not Aristobulus play the traitor and offer to open the gate? and when the soldiers mutinied, and prevented so black a treason, did not Hyrcanus, who was afterwards high priest, assist the besiegers from within,

and enable them to gain possession of the town? In later days, Herod, indeed, who was surnamed the Great, fortified Jerusalem like a soldier and a patriot; but even Herod, our warrior king, soiled his hands with Roman gold, and bowed his head to the Roman yoke. Will you tell me of Agrippa's wall, reared by the namesake and successor of the mighty monarch? Why was it never finished? Can you answer me that? I trow ye know too well; there was fear of displeasing Cæsar, there was the old shameful truckling to Rome. This is the leaven that leaveneth all our leaders; this is the palsy that withereth all our efforts. Is not the chief who defended Jotapata now a guest in the tent of Titus? Is not Agrippa the younger a staunch adherent of Vespasian? Is he not a mere procurator of the empire, for *the province*, forsooth, of Judæa?

“And shall we learn *nothing* from our history? Nothing from the events of our own times, from the scenes we ourselves witness day by day? Must the cedar fall because we fail to destroy the worms that are eating at its core? Shall Jerusalem be desecrated because we fear to denounce the hand that would deliver her to the foe? We have a plague-spot in the nation. We have an enemy

in the town. We have a traitor in the council. Eleazar Ben-Manahem! I bid thee stand forth!"

There is an instinct of danger which seems to warn the statesman like the mariner of coming storms, giving him time to trim his sail, while they are yet below the horizon. When the assembled Senate turned their startled looks on Eleazar, they beheld a countenance unmoved by the suddenness and gravity of the accusation, a bearing that denoted, if not conscious innocence, at least a fixed resolution to wear its semblance without a shadow of weakness or fear.

Pointing to his dusty garments and the stains of toil upon his hands and person, he looked round frankly among the Elders, rather, as it seemed, appealing to the Senate than answering his accuser, in his reply. "These should be sufficient proofs," said he, "if any were wanting, that Eleazar Ben-Manahem hath not been an instant absent from his post. I have but to strip the gown from my breast, and I can show yet deeper marks to attest my loyalty and patriotism. I have not grudged my own blood, nor the blood of my kindred, and of my father's house, to defend the walls of Jerusalem. John of Gischala hath dealt with you in parables, but I speak to you in

the plain language of truth. This right hand of mine is hardened with grasping sword and spear against the enemies of Judah ; and I would cut it off with its own fellow, ere I stretched it forth in amity to the Roman or the heathen. Talk not to me of thy worms and thy cedars ! John of Gischala, man of blood and rapine,—speak out thine accusation plainly, that I may answer it !”

John was stepping angrily forward, when he was arrested by the voice of a venerable, long-bearded senator. “It is not meet,” said the sage, “that accuser and accused should bandy words in the presence of the Council. John of Gischala, we summon thee to lay the matter at once before the Senate, warning thee that an accusation without proofs will but recoil upon the head of him who brings it forward.”

John smiled in grim triumph.

“Elders of Israel,” said he, “I accuse Eleazar Ben-Manahem of offering terms to the enemy.”

Eleazar started, but recovered himself instantaneously. It was war to the knife, as well he knew, between him and John. He must not seem to hesitate now when his ascendancy amongst the people was at such a crisis. He took the plunge at once.

“And I reply,” he exclaimed, indignantly, “that rather than make terms with the Roman, I would plunge the sword into my own body.”

A murmur of applause ran through the Assembly at this spirited declaration. The accused had great weight amongst the nobility and the national party in Jerusalem, of which the Council chiefly consisted. Could Eleazar but persevere in his denial of communication with Titus, he must triumph signally over his adversary; and, to do him justice, there was now but little personal ambition mingled with his desire for supremacy. He was a fanatic, but he was a patriot as well. He believed all things were lawful in the cause of Jerusalem, and trusting to the secret way by which Calchas had left the city for the Roman camp, and by which he felt assured he must have returned, as, thanks to John's precautions, nothing had been heard of his arrival at the Great Gate and subsequent arrest, he resolved to persevere in his denial, and trust to his personal influence to carry things with a high hand.

“There hath been a communication made from his own house, and by one of his own family, to the Roman commander,” urged John, but with a certain air of deference and hesitation, for he per-

ceived the favourable impression made on the Council by his adversary, and he was crafty enough to know the advantage of reserving his convincing proofs for the last, and taking the tide of opinion at the turn.

"I deny it," said Eleazar, firmly. "The children of Ben-Manahem have no dealings with the heathen!"

"It is one of the seed of Ben-Manahem whom I accuse," replied John, still addressing himself to the Elders. "I can prove he hath been seen going to and fro, between the camp and the city."

"His blood be on his own head!" answered Eleazar, solemnly. He had a vague hope that after all they might but have intercepted some poor half-starved wretch whom the pangs of hunger had driven to the enemy.

John looked back amongst his adherents crowding in the gate that led towards the Temple. "I speak not without proofs" said he; "bring forward the prisoner!"

There was a slight scuffle amongst the throng, and a murmur which subsided almost immediately as two young men appeared in the Court, leading between them a figure, having its hands tied, and a mantle thrown over its head.

“Eleazar Ben-Manahem!” said John, in a loud, clear voice that seemed to ring amongst the porticoes and pinnacles of the overhanging Temple, “stand forth! and speak the truth! Is not this man thy brother?”

At the same moment, the mantle was drawn from the prisoner's head, revealing the mild and placid features of Calchas, who looked round upon the Council, neither intimidated nor surprised.

The Senate gazed in each other's faces with concern and astonishment: John seemed, indeed, in a fair way of substantiating his accusation against the man they most trusted in all Jerusalem. The accuser continued, with an affectation of calm unprejudiced judgment, in a cool and dispassionate voice—

“This man was brought to the Great Gate to-day, under a guard of honour, direct from the Roman camp. I happened to be present and the captain of the Gate handed him over at once to me. I appeal to the Council whether I exceeded my duty in arresting him on the spot, permitting him no communication with any one in the town, until I had brought him before them, in this Court. I soon learned that he was the brother of Eleazar, one of our most distinguished leaders, to whom

more than to any other, the defence of the city has been intrusted, who knows better than any one our weakness and the extremity of our need. By my orders he was searched, and on his person was found a scroll, purporting to be from no less a person than the commander of the Tenth Legion, an officer second only in authority to Titus himself, and addressed to one Esca, a Gentile, living in the very house, and I am informed a member of the very family, of Eleazar Ben-Manahem, this elder in Judah, this chief of the Zealots, this member of the Senate, this adviser in council, this man whose right hand is hardened with sword and spear, but who would cut it off with his left, rather than that it should traffic with the enemy! I demand from the Council an order for the arrest of Esca, that he too may be brought before it, and confronted with him whose bread he eats. From the mouth of three offenders, our wise men may peradventure elicit the truth.

“If I have erred in my zeal let the Senate reprove me. If Eleazar can purge himself from my accusation, let him defile my father’s grave, and call me liar and villain to my very beard!”

The Senate, powerfully affected by John’s appeal, and yet unable to believe in the treachery of one

who had earned their entire confidence, seemed at a loss how to act. The conduct of the accused, too, afforded no clue whereby to judge of his probable guilt or innocence. His cheek was very pale, and once he stepped forward a pace, as if to place himself at his brother's side. Then he halted and repeated his former words, "His blood be on his own head," in a loud and broken voice, turning away the while, and glaring round upon the senators like some fierce animal taken in the toils. Calchas, too, kept his eyes fixed on the ground; and more than one observer remarked that the brothers studiously abstained from looking each other in the face. There was a dead silence for several seconds. Then the senator who had before spoken, raised his hand to command attention, and thus addressed the Council—

"This is a grave matter, involving as it does not only the life and death of a son of Judah, but the honour of one of our noblest houses and the safety, nay, the very existence, of the Holy City. A grave matter, and one which may not be dealt with, save by the highest tribunal in the nation. It must be tried before our Sanhedrim, which will assemble for the purpose without delay. Those of us here present who are members of that august

body, will divest their minds of all they have heard in this place to-day, and proceed to a clear and unbiassed judgment of the matters that shall be then brought before them. Nothing has been yet proved against Eleazar Ben-Manahem, though his brother and the Gentile who has to answer the same accusation, must be kept in secure ward. I move that the Council, therefore, be now dissolved, holding itself ready, nevertheless, seeing the imminent peril of the times, to reassemble at an hour's notice, for the welfare of Judah, and the salvation of the Holy City."

Even while he ceased speaking, and ere the grave senators broke up, preparing to depart, a wail was heard outside the Court that chilled the very heart of each, as it rose and fell like a voice from the other world, repeating ever and again, in wild unearthly tones, its solemn warning: "Woe to Jerusalem! Woe to the Holy City! Sin, and sorrow, and desolation. Woe to the Holy City! Woe to Jerusalem!"



CHAPTER VIII.

THE SANHEDRIM.

THE highest tribunal acknowledged by the Jewish law, taking cognizance of matters especially affecting the religious and political welfare of the nation, essentially impartial in its decisions, and admitting of no appeal from its sentence, was that assembly of Seventy, or rather of Seventy-three members, which was called The Sanhedrim.

This court of justice was supposed to express and embody the opinions of the whole nation, consisting as it did of a number which subdivided would have given six representatives for each tribe, besides a president to rule the proceedings of the whole. The latter, who was termed the *Nasi* or Prince of the Sanhedrim, was necessarily of illustrious birth, venerable years, and profound

experience in all matters connected with the law—not only the actual law as laid down by inspiration for the guidance of the Chosen People, but also the traditional law, with its infinite variety of customs, precedents, and ceremonious observances, which had been added to, and as it were overlaid on the other, much to the detriment of that simpler code, which came direct from heaven.

The members themselves of this supreme council, were of noble blood. In no nation, perhaps, was the pride of birth more cherished than amongst the Jews; and in such an assemblage as the Sanhedrim, untainted lineage was the first indispensable qualification. The majority, indeed, consisted of priests and Levites; but other families of secular distinction who could count their ancestors step by step, from generation to generation, through the Great Captivity, and all the vicissitudes of their history, back to the magnificence of Solomon and the glories of David's warlike reign, had their representatives in this solemn conclave.

Not only was nobility a requirement, but also maturity of years, a handsome person, and a dignified bearing; nor were mental attainments

held in less regard than the adventitious advantages of appearance and station. Every elder of the Sanhedrim was obliged to study physic, to become an adept in the science of divination in all its branches, comprising astrology, the casting of nativities and horoscopes, the prediction of future events, and those mysteries of White Magic, as it was called, which bordered so narrowly on the forbidden limits of the Black Art. He was also required to be an excellent linguist; and was indeed supposed to be proficient in the seventy languages, believed to comprise all the tongues of the habitable earth.

No eunuch nor deformed person could aspire to hold a place in this august body, no usurer, no sabbath-breaker, none who were in the practice of any unlawful business or overt sin. Those who sat in the highest place of the Jewish nation, who ruled her councils and held the right of life and death over her children, must be prudent, learned, blameless men, decked with the patent of true nobility both in body and mind.

The Sanhedrim, in its original constitution, was the only Court which had the right of judging capital cases; and this right, involving so grave a responsibility, it was careful to preserve during

all the calamities of the nation, until it fell under the Roman yoke. The empire, however, reserved to itself the power of condemning its criminals to death; but no sooner had the Jews broken out once more in open resistance to their conquerors, than the Sanhedrim resumed all its former privileges and sat again in judgment upon its countrymen.

In a large circular chamber, half within and half without the Temple, this awful Court held its deliberations, the members ranged in order by seniority, occupying the outer semicircle, as it was not lawful to sit down in the sacred precincts. That chamber was now the theatre of a solemn and imposing scene.

The hall itself, which though wide and lofty, appeared of yet larger proportions from its circular form, was hung round with cloth of a dark crimson colour that added much to the prevailing sentiments of gloom which its appearance called forth. Over its entrance was suspended a curtain of the same hue; and the accused who underwent examination in this dreaded locality, found themselves encircled by an unbroken wall the colour of blood. A black carpet was spread on the floor, bordered with a wide yellow margin, on which

were written in black Hebrew characters certain texts of the law, inculcating punishment rather than pardon, inflexible justice rather than a leaning towards mercy and forbearance. The heart of the guilty died within him as he looked uneasily around; and even the innocent might well quail at these preparations for a trial over which an exacting severity was so obviously to hold sway.

The Sanhedrim were accustomed to assemble in an outer chamber, and march in grave procession to the court of trial. The crimson curtain, drawn by an unseen hand, rolled slowly from the door, and the members dressed in black came in by pairs and took their places in order. As they entered, their names were called over by an official concealed behind the hangings; and each man notified his arrival as he passed on to his seat, by the solemn answer,—

“Here! In the presence of the Lord!”

Last of all, the president made his appearance, and assumed a higher chair, set apart a little from the rest.

Then the youngest member offered up a short prayer, to which the whole assembly responded with a deep and fervent Amen! The Court was now considered to be opened, and qualified for the

trial of all causes that should be brought before it during its sitting.

On the present occasion the junior member was a Levite, nearly threescore years of age, of a stately presence, which he had preserved notwithstanding the hardships of the siege, and who retained much of his youthful comeliness with the flowing beard and grave countenance of maturer years. Phineas Ben-Ezra possessed the exterior qualities by which men are prone to be influenced, with a ready tongue, a scheming brain, and an unscrupulous heart. He was attached to John's faction, and a bitter enemy of the Zealots, by whom he had himself been formerly accused of treasonable correspondence with Vespasian; an accusation that he refuted to his own exultation and the utter confusion of his enemies, but which those who had the best means of judging believed to be true nevertheless. He took his seat now with an expression of cold triumph on his handsome features, and exchanged looks with one or two of the colleagues who seemed deepest in his confidence, that the latter knew too well boded considerable danger to the accused whom they were about to try.

The Prince of the Sanhedrim, Matthias the son

of Boethus, who had already filled the office of high-priest, was a stern and conscientious man of the old Jewish party, whose opinions indeed were in accordance with those of Eleazar, and who entertained, besides, a personal friendship for that determined enthusiast, but whose inflexible obstinacy was to be moved by no earthly consideration from the narrow path of duty which he believed his sacred character compelled him to observe.

His great age and austere bearing commanded considerable influence among his countrymen, enhanced by the high office he had previously filled ; nor was he the less esteemed that his severe and even morose disposition, while it gained him few friends, yielded no confidences and afforded no opportunity for the display of those human weaknesses by which a man wins their affections, while he loses the command over his fellow-creatures. His face was very pale and grave now, as he moved haughtily to the seat reserved for him ; and his dark flowing robes, decorated, in right of his former priesthood, with certain mystic symbols, seemed well-fitted to the character of a stern and inflexible judge. The other members of the assembly, though varying in form and feature,

were distinguished one and all by a family likeness, originating probably in similarity of habits and opinions, no less than in a common nationality and the sharing of a common danger, growing daily to its worst. The dark flashing eye, the deep sallow tint, the curving nostril and the waving beard, were no more distinguishing marks of any one individual in the assembly, than were his long black gown and his expression of severe and inscrutable gravity; but even these universal characteristics were not so remarkable as a certain ominous shadow that cast its gloom upon the face of each. It was the shadow of that foe against whom sword and spear, and shield, and javelin, bodily strength, dauntless courage, and skill in the art of war, were all powerless to make head—the foe who was irresistible because he lay at the very heart of the fortress. The weary, anxious, longing look of Hunger was on the faces even of these, the noblest and the most powerful behind the wall. They had stores of gold and silver, rich silks, sparkling jewels, costly wines within their houses; but there was a want of bread, and gaunt uneasy Famine had set his seal, if not as deeply at least as surely, upon these faces in the Sanhedrim as on that of the meanest soldier, who girded his

sword-belt tighter to stay his pangs, as he stood pale and wasted in his armour on the ramparts, over against the foe.

There was a hush for several seconds after the Prince of the Sanhedrim had taken his seat, and the general prayer had been offered up. It was broken at length by Matthias, who rose with slow impressive gestures, drew his robe around him so as to display the sacred symbols and cabalistic figures with which its hem was garnished, and spoke in stern and measured tones:—

“Princes of the House of Judah,” said he, “Elders and Nobles, and Priests and Levites of the nation, we are met once more to-day, in accordance with our ancient prerogative, for the sifting of a grave and serious matter. In this, the highest Council of our country, we adhere to the same forms that have been handed down to us by our fathers from the earliest times, even from their sojourn in the wilderness, that have been preserved through the Great Captivity of our nation, that may have been prohibited by our conquerors, but that we have resumed with that independence which we have recently asserted, and which the Ruler to whom alone we owe allegiance will assuredly enable us to attain. We

will not part with one iota of our privileges, and least of all with our jurisdiction in matters involving life and death; a jurisdiction as inseparable from our very existence as the Tabernacle itself, which we have accompanied through so many vicissitudes, and with which we are so closely allied. That inferior assemblage from which our chosen body is selected has already considered the heavy accusation, which has collected us here. They have decided that the matter is of too grave a character to be dealt with by their own experience—that it involves the condemnation to death of one if not two members of the illustrious family of Ben-Manahem—that it may deprive us of a leader who claims to be among the staunchest of our patriots, who has proved himself the bravest of our defenders. But what then, Princes of the House of Judah, Elders and Nobles, and Priests, and Levites of the nation? Shall I spare the pruning-hook, because it is the heaviest branch in my vineyard that is rotting from its stem? Shall I not rather lop it off with mine own hand, and cast it from me into the consuming fire? If my brother be guilty shall I screen him, brother though he be? Shall I not rather hand him over to the Avenger, and

deliver my own soul? We are all assembled in our places, ready to hear attentively, and to try impartially, whatsoever accusations may be brought before us. Phineas Ben-Ezra, youngest member of the Sanhedrim, I call on thee to count over thy colleagues, and proclaim aloud the sum thereof."

In compliance with established usage, Phineas, thus adjured, rose from his seat, and walking gravely through the hall, told off its inmates one by one, in a loud and solemn voice, then finding the tale to be correct, stopped before the high chair of the Nasi, and proclaimed thrice,—

"Prince of the Sanhedrim, the mystic number is complete!"

The President addressed him again in the prescribed formula,—

"Phineas Ben-Ezra, are we prepared to try each cause according to the traditions of our nation, and the strict letter of the law? Do we abide by the decisions of wisdom without favour, and justice without mercy?"

Then the whole Sanhedrim repeated as with one voice, "Wisdom without favour, and justice without mercy!"

The President now seated himself, and looked

once more to Phineas, who, as the youngest member present, was entitled to give his opinion first. The latter, answering his glance, rose at once and addressed his fellows in a tone of diffidence which would have seemed misplaced in one of his venerable appearance, had he not been surrounded by men of far greater age than himself. "I am but as a disciple," said he, "at the feet of a master, in presence of Matthias the son of Boethus, and my honoured colleagues. Submitting to their experience, I do but venture to ask a question, without presuming to offer my own opinion on its merits. Supposing that the Sanhedrim should be required to try one of its own number, is it lawful that he should remain and sit, as it were, in judgment upon himself?"

Eleazar who was present in his place as a member of the august body, felt that this attack was specially directed against his own safety. He knew the virulence of the speaker, and his rancorous enmity to the Zealots, and recognized the danger to himself of exclusion from the coming deliberations. He was in the act of rising in indignant protest against such an assumption, when he was forestalled by Matthias, who replied in tones of stern displeasure,—

“He must indeed be a mere disciple, and it will be long ere he is worthy of the name of master in the Sanhedrim, who has yet to learn, that our deliberations are uninfluenced by aught we have heard or seen outside the chamber,—that we recognize in our august office no evidence but the proofs that are actually brought before us here. Phineas Ben-Ezra, the Court is assembled; admit accusers and accused. Must I tell thee that we are still ignorant of the cause we are here to try?”

The decision of the Nasi, which was in accordance with traditional observance and established custom, afforded Eleazar a moment's respite, in which to resolve on the course he should adopt; but though his mind was working busily, he sat perfectly unmoved, and to all outward appearance calm and confident; whilst the hangings were again drawn back, and the tread of feet announced the approach of accuser and accused.

The latter were now two in number; for by John's orders a strong guard had already proceeded to Eleazar's house, and laid violent hands on Esca, who, confident in his own innocence and in the influence of his host, accompanied them without apprehension of danger into the presence

of the awful assembly. The Briton's surprise was however great, when he found himself confronted with Calchas, of whose arrest, so skilfully had John managed it, he was as unconscious as the rest of the besieged. The two prisoners were not permitted to communicate with each other; and it was only from a warning glance shot at him by his fellow-sufferer, that Esca gathered they were both in a situation of extreme peril.

It was not without considerable anxiety that Eleazar remarked, when the curtains were drawn back, how a large body of armed men filled the adjoining cloister of the Temple: like the guard who watched the prisoners, these were partizans of John; and so well aware were the Sanhedrim of that fierce soldier's lawless disposition, that they looked uneasily from one to the other, with the painful reflection that he was quite capable of massacring the whole conclave then and there, and taking the supreme government of the city into his own hands.

It was the influence, however, of no deliberative assembly that was feared by a man like John of Gischala. Fierce and reckless to the extreme, he dreaded only the violence of a character bold and unscrupulous as his own. Could he but pull

Eleazar from the pinnacle on which he had hitherto stood, he apprehended no other rival. The chief of the Zealots was the only man who could equal him in craft as well as in courage, whose stratagems were as deep, whose strokes were even bolder than his own. The opportunity he had desired so long was come, he believed, at last. In that circular chamber, thought John, before that council of stern and cruel dotards, he was about to throw the winning cast of his game. It behoved him to play it warily, though courageously. If he could enlist the majority of the Sanhedrim on his own side his rival's downfall was certain. When he had assumed supreme power in Jerusalem, and he made no doubt that would be his next step, it would be time enough to consider whether he too might not insure his own safety, and make terms with Titus by delivering up the town to the enemy.

Standing apart from the prisoners, and affecting an air of extreme deference to his audience, John addressed the Nasi, in the tones rather of an inferior who excused himself for an excess of zeal in the performance of his duty, than of an equal denouncing a traitor and demanding justice for an offence.

"I leave my case," said he, "in the hands of the Sanhedrim, appealing to them whether I have exceeded my authority, or accused any man falsely of a crime which I am unable to prove. I only ask for the indulgence due to a mere soldier, who is charged with the defence of the city, and is jealous of everything that can endanger her safety. From each member here present without a single exception, from Matthias the son of Boethus to Phineas Ben Ezra of the family of Nehemiah, I implore a favourable hearing. There stands the man whom I secured at noon this day, coming direct from Titus, with a written scroll upon his person, of which the superscription was to a certain Gentile dwelling in the house of Eleazar, who is also present before you, and purporting to be in the writing of that warrior of the heathen who commands the Tenth Legion. Was it not my duty to bring such a matter at once before the Council? and was it not expedient that the Council should refer so grave a question to the Sanhedrim?"

Matthias bent his brows sternly upon the speaker, and thus addressed him:—

"Thou art concealing thy thoughts from those to whose favour thou makest appeal. John

of Gischala, thou art no unpractised soldier to draw a bow at a venture, and heed not where the shaft may strike. Speak out thine accusation, honestly, boldly, without fear of man, before the Assembly, or for ever hold thy peace !”

Thus adjured, John of Gischala cast an anxious glance at the surrounding faces turned towards him, with varying expressions of expectation, anger, encouragement, and mistrust. Then he looked boldly at the President, and made his accusation before the Sanhedrim as he had already made it before the Council—

“I charge Eleazar Ben-Manahem,” said he, “with treason, and I charge these two men as his instruments. Let them clear themselves if they can !”



CHAPTER IX.

THE PAVED HALL.

ALL eyes were now turned on Eleazar, who sat unmoved in his place, affecting a composure which he was far from feeling. His mind, indeed, was tortured to agony by the conflict that went on within. Should he stand boldly forward and confess that he had sent his own brother into the Roman camp, with proposals for surrender? Well he knew, that such a confession would be tantamount to placing his neck at once under John of Gischala's foot. Who amongst his most devoted partizans would have courage to profess a belief in his patriotic motives, or allow that he was satisfied with the explanation offered for such a flagrant act of treason? The condemnation of the Sanhedrim would be the signal for his downfall and

his death. When he was gone, who would be left to save Jerusalem? This was the consideration that affected him, far more than any personal apprehensions of danger or disgrace.

On the other hand, should he altogether renounce his brother, and disavow the authority he had given him? It has already been said, that as far as he loved any living being, he loved Calchas: perhaps had it not been so, he might have shrunk from the disgrace of abandoning one who had acted under his own immediate orders, and risked so much in obeying them; but in the depths of his fierce heart, something whispered that self-sacrifice was essentially akin to duty, and that *because* he loved him, therefore he must offer up his brother, as a man offers up a victim at the altar.

Nevertheless, he ran his eye hastily over his seventy-two colleagues, as they sat in grave deliberation, and summed up rapidly the score of friends and foes. It was nearly balanced, yet he knew there were many who would take their opinions from the Nasi; and from that stern old man he could expect nothing but the severity of impartial justice. He dared not look at Calchas, he dared not cover his face with his hand to gain a

brief respite from the cold grave eyes that were fixed upon him. It was a bitter moment, but he reflected that, in the cause of Jerusalem, shame and suffering and sorrow, and even sin became sacred, and he resolved to sacrifice all, even his own flesh and blood, to his ascendancy in the town.

He was spared the pain, however, of striking the fatal blow with his own hand. Matthias, scrupulous in all matters of justice, had decided that until the accusation against him was supported by some direct evidence, no member of the Sanhedrim could be placed in the position of a culprit. He therefore determined to interrogate the prisoners himself, and ascertain whether anything would be elicited of so grave a nature as to cause Eleazar's suspension from his present office, and the consequent reassembling of the whole Sanhedrim; a delay that in the present critical state of matters it was desirable to avoid, the more so that the day was already far advanced, and the morrow was the Sabbath.

He therefore ordered the two prisoners to be placed in the centre of the hall; and, looking sternly towards the accused, began his interrogations in the severe accents of one who is an avenger rather than a judge.

The mild eye and placid demeanour of Calchas afforded a strong contrast to the frowning brows and flashing glances of the Nasi.

"Your name, old man," said the latter, abruptly.
"Your name, lineage, and generation."

"Calchas, the son of Simeon," was the reply,
"the son of Manahem, of the house of Manahem,
and of the tribe of Judah."

"Art thou not the brother of Eleazar Ben-Manahem, who is sitting yonder in his place as a member of the Sanhedrim, before whom thou hast to plead?"

Ere he replied, Calchas stole a look at Eleazar, who forced himself to return it. There was something in the elder brother's face that caused the younger to turn his eyes away, and bend them on the ground.

The fierce old President, impatient of that momentary delay, broke out angrily:

"Nay, look up man! no subterfuges will avail thee here. Remember the fate of those who dare to lie in the presence of the Sanhedrim!"

Calchas fixed his eye on the President's in mild rebuke.

"I am in a higher presence than thine, Matthias son of Boethus," said he; "neither need the chil-

dren of Manahem be adjured to speak truth before God and man !”

“Hast thou heard the accusation brought against thee by John of Gischala ?” proceeded the Nasi. “Canst thou answer it with an open brow and a clean heart ?”

“I heard the charge,” replied Calchas, “and I am ready to answer it for myself, and for him who is in bonds by my side. Have I permission to clear myself before the Sanhedrim ?”

“Thou wilt have enough to do to slip thine own neck out of the yoke,” answered Matthias, sternly. “Colleagues,” he added, looking round, “ye have heard the accuser, will ye now listen to the accused ?”

Then Phineas, speaking for the rest, answered : “We will hear him, Nasi, without favour, we will judge him without mercy.”

Thus encouraged, Calchas shook the white hair from his brow, and entered boldly on his defence.

“It is true,” said he, “that I have been outside the walls. It is true that I have been in the Roman camp, nay, that I have been in the very presence of Titus himself. Shall I tell the Assembly of the strength of Rome, of the discipline

of her armies, of the late reinforcement of her legions? Shall I tell them that I saw the very auxiliaries eating wheaten bread and the flesh of kids and sheep, whilst my countrymen are starving behind the walls? Shall I tell them that we are outnumbered by our foes, and are ourselves weakened by dissensions, and wasting our strength and courage day by day. Shall I tell them that I read on the face of Titus confidence in himself and reliance on his army, and, even with a conviction that he should prevail, a wish to show pity and clemency to the vanquished? All this they already know, all this must make it needless for me to enter into any defence beyond a simple statement of my motives. Nay, I have gathered intelligence from the Roman camp," he added, now fixing his eyes on his brother, to whom he had no other means of imparting the answer, which the Prince had confided to him through Licinius by word of mouth, "intelligence, the importance of which should well bear me harmless, even had I committed a greater offence than escaping from a beleaguered town to hold converse with the enemy. Titus," he spoke now in a loud clear voice, of which every syllable rang through the building—"Titus bade me be assured that his

determination was unalterable, to grant no further delay, but, surrender or no surrender, to enter Jerusalem the day after the Sabbath, and if he encountered resistance to lay waste the Holy City with fire and sword!" *

Eleazar started to his feet, but recollected himself, and resumed his seat instantaneously. The action might well be interpreted as the mere outbreak of a soldier's energy, called, as it were, by the sound of the trumpet to the wall. This then was what he had gained, a respite, a reprieve of one day, and that one day he had purchased at the dear price of his brother's life. Yet even now the fierce warrior reflected with a grim delight, how judiciously he had used the time accorded him, and how, when the proud Roman did make his threatened assault, he would meet with a reception worthy of the warlike fame so long enjoyed by the Jewish nation.

The rest of the Sanhedrim seemed scared and stupefied. Every man looked in his neighbour's face, and read there only dismay and blank despair. The crisis had been long threatening, and now it was at hand. Resistance was hopeless, escape impossible, and captivity insupportable. The prevailing feeling in the Assembly was, never-

theless, one of indignation against the bearer of such unwelcome tidings.

The Nasi was the first to recover himself, yet even he seemed disturbed. "By whose authority," said he, and every eye was turned on Eleazar while he spoke,—“by whose authority didst thou dare to enter the camp of the enemy, and traffic with the Gentile who encompasseth the Holy City with bow and spear?”

The chief of the Zealots knew well that he was the observed of all his colleagues, many of whom would triumph at his downfall, whilst even his own partizans would detach themselves from it, each to the best of his abilities, when his faction ceased to be in the ascendant. He knew, too, that on his brother's answer hung not only his life—which indeed he had risked too often to rate at a high value—but the stability of the whole fabric he had been building for months—the authority by which he hoped to save Jerusalem and Judæa, for which he grudged not to peril his immortal soul; and knowing all this, he forced his features into a sedate and solemn composure. He kept his eye away from the accused indeed, but fixed sternly on the President, and sat in his place the only man in the whole of that panic-stricken

assembly, who appeared master of the situation, and confident in himself.

Calchas paused before he answered, waiting till the stir was hushed, and the attention which had been diverted to his brother settled once more on his own case. Then he addressed the Nasi in bold sonorous accents, his form dilating, his face brightening as he spoke :

“By the authority of Him who came to bring peace on earth ! By the authority that is as far greater than that of Sanhedrim, or priest, or conqueror, as the heavens are higher than the sordid speck of dust on which, but for that authority, we should only swarm and grovel and live one little hour, like the insects dancing in the sunbeams, to die at the close of day. I am a man of peace. Could I bear to see my country wasted by the armed hand, and torn by the trampling hoof ? I love my neighbour as myself. Could I bear to know that his grasp was day by day on his brother’s throat ? I have learned from my Master that all are brethren, besieger and besieged, Roman and barbarian, Jew and Gentile, bond and free. Are they at variance, and shall I not set them at one ? Are their swords at each other’s breasts, and shall I not step between and bid them

be at peace? By whose authority, dost thou ask me, Matthias son of Boethus? By His authority who came to you, and ye knew Him not. Who preached to you, and ye heeded Him not. Who would have saved you in his own good time from the great desolation, and ye reviled Him, and judged Him, and put Him to death on yonder hill!"

Even the Prince of the Sanhedrim was staggered at the old man's boldness. Like other influential men of his nation, he could not ignore the existence of a well-known sect, which had already exchanged its title of Nazarenes for that of Christians, the name in which it was hereafter to spread itself over the whole earth; but the very mention of these self-devoted men was an abomination in his ears, and the last house in which he could have expected to find a votary of the cross, was that of Eleazar Ben-Manahem, chief of such a party as the Zealots, and grounding his influence on his exclusive nationality and strict adhesion to the very bigotry of the Jewish law. He looked on Calchas for a space, as if scarcely believing his eyes. Then there came over his features, always stern and harsh, an expression of pitiless severity, and he addressed his colleagues, rather than the accused.

"This is even a graver matter than I had thought for," said he, in a low yet distinct voice, that made itself heard in the farthest corner of the Court. "Princes of the house of Judah, Elders and Nobles, and Priests and Levites of the nation, I am but the instrument of your will, the weapon wielded by your collective might. Is it not the duty of mine office that I smite and spare not?"

"Smite and spare not!" repeated Phineas; and the whole Assembly echoed the merciless verdict.

There was not one dissentient, not even Eleazar, sitting gloomy and resolved in his place.

Then Matthias turned once more to Calchas, and said, still in the same suppressed tones,

"Thou speakest in parables, and men may not address the Sanhedrim save in the brief language of fact. Art thou then one of those accursed Nazarenes who have called themselves Christians of late?"

"I am indeed a Christian," answered Calchas, "and I glory in the name. Would that thou, Matthias son of Boethus, and these the elders of Judah, were partakers with me in all that name affords."

Then he looked kindly and joyfully in Eleazar's face, for he knew that he had saved his brother.

The corslet of the latter rattled beneath his long black robe with the shiver that ran through his whole frame. The tension was taken off his nerves at last, and the relief was great, but it was purchased at too dear a price. Now that it was doomed, he felt the value of his brother's life. He was totally unmanned, and shifted uneasily in his seat, not knowing what to do or say. They seemed to have changed places at last—Calchas to have assumed the bold unyielding nature, and Eleazar the loving tender heart.

He recovered himself, however, before long. The ruling passion triumphed once more, as he anticipated the discomfiture of his rival, and the speedy renewal of his own ascendancy amongst his countrymen.

The Prince of the Sanhedrim reflected for a few moments ere he turned his severe frown on Esca, and said,

“What doth this Gentile here in the Court of the Sanhedrim? Let him speak what he knoweth in this matter, ere he answer his own crime. Thy testimony at least may be valid,” he added, scornfully, “for thou surely art not a Christian?”

The Briton raised his head proudly to reply. If there was less of holy meekness in his de-

meanour than in that of Calchas, there was the same bold air of triumph, the same obvious defiance of consequences, usually displayed by those who sealed their testimony with their blood.

"I *am* a Christian," said he. "I confess it, and I too, like my teacher there, glory in the name! I will not deny the banner under which I serve. I will fight under that banner, even to the death."

The Nasi's very beard bristled with indignation; he caught up the skirt of his mantle, and tore it asunder to the hem. Then, raising the pieces thus rent above his head, he cried out in a loud voice, "It is enough! They have spoken blasphemy before the Sanhedrim. There is nothing more but to pronounce immediate sentence of death. Phineas Ben-Ezra, bid thy colleagues adjourn to the Stone-paved Hall!"

Then the Assembly rose in silence, and marching gravely two by two, passed out into an adjoining chamber, which was paved, and roofed, and faced with stone. Here alone was it lawful to pass sentence of death on those whom the Sanhedrim had condemned; and here, while their judges stood round them in a circle, the prisoners with their guard fronting the Nasi, took their position in the midst. The latter stooping to the

ground went through the form of collecting a handful of dust and throwing it into the air.

"Thus," said he, "your lives are scattered to the winds, and your blood recoils on your own heads. You, Calchas the son of Simeon, the son of Manahem, of the house of Manahem, and you, Gentile called Esca on the scroll which has been delivered into my hand, shall be kept in secure ward till to-morrow be past, seeing that it is the Sabbath, and at morning's dawn on the first day of the week ye shall be stoned with stones in the Outer Court adjoining the Temple until ye die; and thus shall be done, and more also, to those who are found guilty of blasphemy in the presence of the Sanhedrim!"

Then turning to Eleazar, who still retained his forced composure throughout the hideous scene, he added:

"For thee, Eleazar Ben-Manahem, thy name is still untarnished in the nation, and thy place still knows thee amongst thy brethren. The testimony of a Nazarene is invalid; and no accusation hath yet been brought against thee supported by any witness save these two condemned and accursed men. That thou hast no portion, my brother, with blasphemers scarcely needs thine own

unsupported word in the ears of the Sanhedrim!"

Eleazar, with the same fixed white face, looked wildly round him on the assembled elders, turning up the sleeves of his gown the while, and moving his hands over each other as though he were washing them.

"Their blood be on their own head," said he. "I renounce them from my family and my household—I abjure them, I wash my hands of them—their blood be on their own head!"

And while he spoke, the warning voice was heard again outside the Temple, causing even the bold heart of the Nasi to thrill with a wild and unaccustomed fear—the voice of the wailing prophet crying, "Woe to Jerusalem! Woe to the Holy City! Sin and Sorrow and Desolation! Woe to the Holy City! Woe to Jerusalem!"



CHAPTER X.

A ZEALOT OF THE ZEALOTS.

THE man who has resolved that he will shake himself free from those human affections and human weaknesses which, like the corporeal necessities of hunger and thirst, seem to have been given us for our enjoyment rather than our discomfort, will find he undertakes a task too hard for mortal courage and for mortal strength. Without those pleasant accessories, like water and sunshine, the simple and universal luxuries of mankind, existence may indeed drag on, but it can scarcely be called life. The Great Dispenser of all knows best. His children are not meant to stand alone, independent of each other and of Him. While they help their fellows, and trust in His strength, they are strong indeed ; but no sooner do they lean

on the staff themselves have fashioned, than they stumble and fall. It wounds the hand that grasps it, and breaks too surely when it is most needed at the last.

Eleazar believed when he quitted the Paved Hall in which the Sanhedrim pronounced their sentence, that the bitterest drop was drained in the cup he had forced himself to quaff. He had not anticipated the remorseful misery that awaited him in his own home, the empty seats, where *they* were not, the tacit reproach of every familiar object—worst of all the meeting with Mariamne, the daughter of his affections, the only child of his house.

All that dreary Sabbath-morning, the Zealot sat in his desolate home fearing,—yes, he who seemed to fear nothing, to whom the battle-cry of shouting thousands on the wall was but as a heart-stirring and inspiring music,—fearing the glance of a girl's dark eye, the tone of her gentle voice, and that girl his own daughter. There was no daily sacrifice in the Temple now—that last cherished prerogative of the Jewish religion had been suspended. His creed forbade him to busy himself in any further measures of defence which would involve labour on the Sacred Day. He

might not work with lever and crow-bar at the breach. All that could be done in so short a space of time had been done by his directions yesterday. He must sit idle in his stately dwelling, brooding darkly over his brother's fate, or traverse his marble floor in restless strides, with clenched hands, and gnashing teeth, and a wild despair raging at his heart. Yet he never yielded nor wavered in his fanatical resolve. Had it all to be done once more, he would do the same again.

One memory there was that he could not shake off—a vague and dreary memory that sometimes seemed to soothe, and sometimes to madden him. The image of Mariamne would come up before his eyes, not as now in her fair and perfect womanhood, but as a helpless loving little child, running to him with outstretched arms, and round cheeks wet with tears, asking him for the precious favourite that had gone with the rest of the flock to one of those great sacrifices with which the Jews kept their sacred festivals—the kid that was his child's playfellow; that he would have ransomed had he but known it in time, with whole hecatombs of sheep and oxen, ere it should have been destroyed. The child had no mother even

then, and he remembered, with a strange clearness, how he had taken the weeping little girl on his knee and soothed her with unaccustomed tenderness, while she put her arms round his neck and laid her soft cheek against his own, accepting consolation and sobbing herself to sleep upon his breast.

After this there seemed to grow up a tacit confidence—a strong, though unspoken affection—between father and daughter. They seldom exchanged many words in a day, sometimes scarcely more than a look. No two human beings could be much less alike, or have less in common. There was but this one slender link between them, and yet how strong it had been!

After a while it angered him to find this memory softening, while it oppressed him, whether he would or no. He resolved he would see Mariamne at once and face the worst.

She knew he had avoided her, and held him in too great awe to risk giving offence by forcing herself upon him. Ignorant of Esca's arrest, the instinctive apprehension of a woman for the man she loves had yet caused her to suspect some threatened danger from his prolonged absence. She watched her opportunity, therefore, to enter

her father's presence and gain tidings if possible of his brother and the Briton.

The hours sped on, and the fierce Syrian noon was already glaring down upon the white porches and dazzling streets of the Holy City. The hush of the Sabbath was over all; but it seemed more like the brooding, unnatural hush that precedes earthquake or tempest, than the quiet of a day devoted to peaceful enjoyment and repose.

Her father was accustomed to drink a cup of wine at this hour, and Mariamne brought it him, trembling the while to learn the certainty of that which she could not yet bear to leave in doubt. She entered the room in which he sat, with faltering steps, and stood before him with a certain graceful timidity that seemed to deprecate his resentment. His punishment had begun already. She reminded him of her mother, standing there pale and beautiful in her distress.

"Father," she said, softly, as he took the cup from her hand and set it down untasted, without speaking, "where is our kinsman Calchas? and—and Esca the Briton? Father! tell me the worst at once. I am your own daughter and I can bear it."

The worst, had she allowed herself to embody

her vague fears, would have applied to the younger of the absent ones. It would have assumed that he was gravely wounded, even dangerously. Not killed—surely not killed!

He turned his eyes upon her sternly, nay, angrily; but even then he could not tell her till he had lifted the cup and drained it every drop. His lip was steady now, and his face was harder, gloomier, than before, while he spoke:

“Daughter of Ben - Manahem!” said he, “henceforth thou hast no portion with him who was thy kinsman but yesterday, neither with him the Gentile within my gate, who has eaten of my bread and drank from my cup, and stood with me shoulder to shoulder against the Roman on the wall.”

She clasped her hands in agony, and her very lips turned white; but she said true—she was his own daughter, and she neither tottered nor gave way. In measured tones she repeated her former words. “Tell me the worst, father. I can bear it.”

He found it easier now that he had begun, and he could lash himself into a spurious anger as he went on, detailing the events of the previous day;

the charges brought forward by John of Gischala, the trial before the Sanhedrim, his own narrow escape, and the confession of the two culprits, owning, nay, glorying in their mortal crime. He fenced himself in, with the sophistry of an enthusiast and a fanatic. He deluded himself into the belief that he had been injured and aggrieved by the apostacy of the condemned. He poured forth all the eloquence that might have vindicated him before Matthias and his colleagues, had John's accusation been ever brought to proof. The girl stood petrified and overpowered with his violence: at last he denounced herself, for having listened so eagerly to the gentle doctrines of her own father's brother, for having consorted on terms of friendship with the stranger whom he had been the first to encourage and welcome beneath his roof. Once she made her appeal on Esca's behalf, but he silenced her ere she had half completed it.

"Father," she urged, "though a Gentile he conformed to the usages of our people; though a stranger, I have heard yourself declare that not a warrior in our ranks struck harder for the Holy City than your guest, the brave and loyal Esca!" He interrupted her with a curse.

“Daughter of Ben-Manahem!—in the day in which thou shalt dare again to speak that forbidden name, may thine eye wax dim, and thy limbs fail, and thy heart grow cold within thy breast—that thou be cut off even then in thy sin,—that thou fall like a rotten branch from the tree of thy generation—that thou go down into the dust and vanish like water spilt on the sand—that thy name perish everlastingly from among the maidens of Judah and the daughters of thy father’s house!”

Though his fury terrified it did not master her. Some women would have fled in dismay from his presence—some would have flung themselves on their knees and sought to move him to compassion with prayers and tears. Mariamne looked him fixedly in the face with a quiet sorrow in her own that touched him to the quick, and maddened him the more.

“Father,” she said, softly,—“I have nothing left to fear in this world. Slay me, but do not curse me!”

The vision of her childhood, the memory of her mother, the resigned sadness of her bearing, and the consciousness of his own injustice, conspired to infuriate him.

"Slay thee!" he repeated between his set teeth. "By the bones of Manahem—by the head of the high-priest—by the veil of the Temple itself, if ever I hear thee utter that accursed name again, I will slay thee with mine own hand!"

It was no empty threat, to a daughter of her nation. Such instances of fanaticism were neither unknown to the sterner sects of the Jews, nor regarded with entirely unfavourable eyes by that self-devoted and enthusiastic people. The tale of Jephthah's daughter was cherished rather as an example of holy and high-minded obedience, than a warning from rash and inconsiderate vows. The father was more honoured as a hero, than the daughter was pitied for a victim. And in later times one Simon of Scythopolis, who had taken up arms against his own countrymen and repented of his treachery, regained a high place in their estimation by putting himself to death, having previously slain every member of his family with his own hand.* It would have only

* Now when he had said this he looked round about him, upon his family, with eyes of commiseration and of rage (that family consisted of a wife and children, and his aged parents), so in the first place he caught his father by his gray hairs, and ran his sword through him, and after him he did the same to his mother, who willingly received it; and after them he did the like to his

added one more incident, causing but little comment, to the horrors of the siege, had the life of Mariamne been taken by her own father, on his very threshold.

She looked at him more in surprise than fear, with a hurt reproachful glance that pierced him to the heart. "Father!" she exclaimed; "you cannot mean it. Unsay those cruel words. Am I not your daughter? Father! father! you used to love me, when I was a little girl!"

Then his savage mood gave way, and he took her to him and spoke to her in gentle soothing accents as of old. "Thou art a daughter of Manahem," said he,— "a maiden of Judah. It is not fit for thee to consort with the enemies of thy nation and of thy father's house. These men have avowed the pernicious doctrines of the Nazarenes, who call themselves Christians. Therefore they are become an abomination in our

wife and children, every one almost offering themselves to his sword, as desirous to prevent being slain by their enemies; so when he had gone over all his family he stood upon their bodies, to be seen by all, and stretching out his right hand, that his action might be observed by all, he sheathed his entire sword into his own bowels. This young man was to be pitied, on account of the strength of his body, and the courage of his soul. —Josephus, 'Wars of the Jews,' book ii. sec. 18.

sight, and are to be cut off from amongst our people. Mariamne, if I can bear unmoved to see my brother perish, surely it is no hard task for thee to give up this stranger guest. It is not that my heart is iron to the core, though thou seest me oft-times so stern even with thee ; but the men of to-day, who have taken upon themselves the defence of Jerusalem from the heathen, must be weaned from human affections and human weaknesses, even as the child is weaned from its mother's milk. I tell thee, girl, I would not count the lives of all my kindred against one hour of the safety of Judah ; and Mariamne, though I love thee dearly, ay, better far than thou canst know—for whom have I now but thee, my daughter?—yet if I believed that thou too couldst turn traitor to thy country and thy faith—I speak it not in anger—flesh and blood of mine own though thou be, I would bury my sword in thy heart !”

Had Eleazar's looks corresponded with his words, such a threat in her present frame of mind might have caused Mariamne to avow herself a Christian, and brave the worst at once ; but there was a weight of care on her father's haggard brow, a mournful tenderness in his eyes, that stirred the very depths of her being in compassion—that

merged all other feelings in one of intense pity for the misery of that fierce, resolute, and desolate old man. For the moment she scarcely realized Esca's danger in her sympathy for the obvious sufferings of one usually so self-reliant and unmoved. She came closer to his side, and placed her hand in his, without speaking. He looked fondly down at her.

"Abide with me for a space," said he; "Mariamne, thou and I are left alone in the world."

Then he covered his face with his hands and remained without speaking, wrapped as it seemed in gloomy reflections, that she dared not disturb. So the two sat on through the weary hours of that long, hot Sabbath-day. Whenever she made the slightest movement, he looked up and signed for her to remain where she was. Though it was torture, she dared not disobey; and while the time slipped on, and the shadows lengthened, and the breeze began to stir, she knew that every minute as it passed, brought her lover nearer and nearer to a cruel death. Thus much she had learned too surely; but with the certainty were aroused all the energies of her indomitable race, and she resolved that he should be saved.

Many a scheme passed through her working

brain, as she sat in her father's presence, fearing now, above all things, to awake his suspicion of her intentions by word or motion, and so make it impossible for her to escape. Of all her plans there was but one that seemed feasible; and even that one presented difficulties almost insurmountable for a woman.

She knew that she was safe at least till the morrow. No execution could take place on the Sabbath; and although the holy day would conclude at sun-down, it was not the custom of her nation to put their criminals to death till after the dawn, so that she had the whole night before her in which to act. But, on the other hand, her father would not leave his home during the Sabbath, and she would be compelled to remain under his observation till the evening. At night, then, she had resolved to make her escape, and taking advantage of the private passage, only known to her father's family, by which Calchas had reached the Roman camp, to seek Titus himself, and offer to conduct his soldiers by that path into the city, stipulating as the price of her treachery an immediate assault and the rescue of her kinsman Calchas, with his fellow-sufferer. Girl as

she was, it never occurred to her that Titus might refuse to believe in her good faith towards himself, and was likely to look upon the whole scheme as a design to lead his army into an ambush. The only difficulty that presented itself, was her own escape from the city. She never doubted but that once in the Roman camp, her tears and entreaties would carry everything before them, and whatever became of herself, her lover would be saved.

It was not, however, without a strong conflict of feelings that she came to this desperate resolve. The blood that flowed in her veins was loyal enough to tingle with shame ever and anon, as she meditated such treachery against her nation. Must she, a daughter of Judah, admit the enemy into the Holy City? Could the child of Eleazar Ben-Manahem, the boldest warrior of her hosts, the staunchest defender of her walls, be the traitor to defile Jerusalem with a foreign yoke? She looked at her father sitting there, in gloomy meditation, and her heart failed her as she thought of his agony of shame, if he lived to learn the truth, of the probability that he would never survive to know it, but perish virtually by *her* hand, in an unprepared and desperate resistance. Then she

thought of Esca, tied to the stake, the howling rabble, the cruel mocking faces, the bare arms and the uplifted stones. There was no further doubt after that—no more wavering—nothing but the dogged immovable determination that proved whose daughter she was.

When the sun had set, Eleazar seemed to shake off the fit of despondency that had oppressed him during the day. The Sabbath was now past, and it was lawful for him to occupy mind and body in any necessary work. He bade Mariamne light a lamp and fetch him certain pieces of armour that had done him good service, and now stood in need of repair. It was a task in the skilful fulfilment of which every Jewish warrior prided himself. Men of the highest rank would unwillingly commit the renewal of these trusty defences to any fingers but their own; and Eleazar entered upon it with more of cheerfulness than he had shown for some time. As he secured one rivet after another, with the patience and precision required, every stroke of the hammer seemed to smite upon his daughter's brain. There she was compelled to remain a close prisoner, and the time was gliding away so fast! At length when the night was already far advanced, even Eleazar's strong frame began to

feel the effects of hunger, agitation, labour and want of rest. He nodded two or three times over his employment, worked on with redoubled vigour, nodded again, let his head sink gradually on his breast, while the hammer slipped from his relaxing fingers, and he fell asleep.



CHAPTER XI.

THE DOOMED CITY.

MARIAMNE watched her father for a few impatient minutes that seemed to lengthen themselves into hours, till she had made sure by his deep respiration that her movements would not wake him. Then she extinguished the lamp and stole softly from the room, scarcely breathing, till she found herself safe out of the house. The door through which she emerged was a private egress opening on the wide terrace that overhung the gardens. Its stone balustrades and broad flight of steps were now white and glistening in the moonlight, which shone brighter and fairer in those mellow skies, than doth many a noon-day in the misty north. While she paused to draw breath, and concentrate every faculty on the task she had undertaken, she could not but admire the scene spread out

at her very feet. There lay the gardens in which she had followed many a childish sport, and dreamed out many a maiden's dream, sitting in the shade of those black cypresses, and turning her young face to catch the breeze that stirred their whispering branches, direct from the hills of Moab, blending in the far distance with the summer sky. And lately, too, amid all the horrors and dangers of the siege, had she not trod these level lawns with Esca, and wondered how she could be so happy while all about her was strife and desolation and woe? The thought goaded her into action, and she passed rapidly on; nevertheless, in that one glance around, the fair and gorgeous picture stamped itself for ever on her brain.

Beneath her, here black as ebony, there glistening like sheets of burnished steel, lay the clear-cut terraces and level lawns of her father's stately home, dotted by tall tapering cypresses pointing to the heavens, and guarded by the red stems of many a noble cedar, flinging its twisted branches aloft in the midnight sky. Beyond, the spires and domes and pinnacles of the Holy City, glittered and shone in the mellow light, or loomed in the alternate shade, fantastic, gloomy, and indistinct. Massive blocks of building, relieved by rows

of marble pillars supporting their heavy porticoes, denoted the dwellings of her princes and nobles; while encircling the whole could be traced the dark level line of her last defensive wall, broken by turrets placed at stated intervals, and already heightened at the fatal breach opposite the tower of Antonia, from the summit of which glowed one angry spot of fire, a beacon kindled for some hostile purpose by the enemy. High above all, like a gigantic champion guarding his charge, in burnished armour and robes of snowy white, rose the Temple with its marble dome and roof of beaten gold. It was the champion's last watch—it was the last sleep of the fair and holy City. Never again would she lie in the moonlight, beautiful and gracious and undefaced. Doomed, like the Temple in which she trusted, to be utterly demolished and destroyed; the plough was already yoked that should score its furrows deep into her comeliness; the mighty stones, so hewn and carved and fashioned into her pride of strength, were even now vibrating to that shock which was about to hurl them down into such utter ruin, that not one should be left to rear itself upon the fragments of another!

The moon-beams shone calm and pleasant on

the doomed city, as they shone on the stunted groves of the Mount of Olives, on the distant crest of the hills of Moab, and far away below these, on the desolate plains that skirt the waters of the Dead Sea. They shone down calm and pleasant, as though all were in peace and safety, and plenty and repose ; yet even now the arm of the avenger was up to strike, the eagle's wing was pruned, his beak whetted ; and Mariamne, standing on the terrace by her father's door, could count the Roman watch-fires already established in the heart of the Lower City, twinkling at regular distances along the summit of Mount Calvary.

The view of the enemy's camp, the thought of Esca's danger, spurred her to exertion. She hurried along the terrace, and down into the garden, following the path which she knew was to lead her to the marble basin with its hidden entrance to the secret passage. Her only thought now was one of apprehension that her unassisted strength might be unable to lift the slab. Full but of this care, she advanced swiftly and confidently towards the disused fountain, to stop within ten paces of it, and almost scream aloud in the high state of tremor to which her nerves had been strung,—so startled was she, and scared at what she saw.

Sitting with its back to her, a long lean figure stooped and cowered over the empty basin, waving its arms and rocking its body to and fro, with strange unearthly gestures, and broken muttered sentences varied by gasps and moans. Her nation are not superstitious, and Mariamne had too many causes for fear in this world, to spare much dread for the denizens of another ; nevertheless she stood for a space almost paralysed with the suddenness of the alarm, and the unexpected nature of the apparition, quaking in every limb, and unable either to advance or fly.

There are times when the boldest of human minds become peculiarly susceptible to supernatural terrors—when the hardest and least impressionable persons are little stronger than their nervous and susceptible brethren. A little anxiety, a little privation, the omission of a meal or two, nay even the converse of such abstinence in too great indulgence of the appetites, bring down the boasted reason of mankind to a sad state of weakness and credulity. The young, too, are more subject to such fantastic terrors than the old. Children suffer much from fears of the supernatural, conceiving in their vivid imaginations forms and phantoms and situations, which they can never

have previously experienced, and of which it is therefore difficult to account for the origin. But all classes, and all ages, if they speak truth, must acknowledge, that at one time or another, they have felt the blood curdle, the skin creep, the breath come quick, and the heart rise with that desperate courage which springs from intense fear, at the fancied presence or the dreaded proximity of some ghostly object which eludes them after all, leaving a vague uncertainty behind it, that neither satisfies their curiosity nor insures them against a second visitation of a similar nature.

Mariamne was in a fit state to become the victim of any such supernatural delusion. Her frame was weakened by the want of food; for like the rest of the besieged, she had borne her share of the privations that created such sufferings in the city for many long weeks before it was finally reduced. She had gone through much fatigue of late—the continuous unbroken fatigue that wears the spirits even faster than the bodily powers; and above all she had been harassed for the last few hours by the torture of inaction in a state of protracted suspense. It was no wonder that she should suffer a few moments of intense and inexplicable fear.

The figure, still with its back to her, and rocking to and fro, was gathering handfuls of dust from the disused basin of the fountain, and scattering them, with its long lean arms upon its head and shoulders, chanting at the same time, in wild, mournful tones, the words "Wash and be clean," over and over again.

It obviously imagined itself alone, and pursued its monotonous task with that dreary earnestness and endless repetition so peculiar to the actions of the insane.

After a while, Mariamne perceiving that she was not observed, summoned courage to consider what was best to be done. The secret of the hidden passage was one to be preserved inviolate under any circumstances; and to-night everything she most prized depended on its not being discovered by the besieged. While the figure remained in its present position, she could do nothing towards the furtherance of her scheme. And yet the moments were very precious, and Esca's life depended on her speed.

There was no doubt, the unfortunate who had thus wandered into her father's gardens, was a maniac; and those who suffered under this severe affliction were held in especial horror among her

people. Unlike the eastern nations of to-day, who believe them to be not only under its special protection but even directly inspired by Providence, the Jews held that these sufferers were subject to the great principle of evil; that malignant spirits actually entered into the body of the insane, afflicting, mocking, and torturing their victim, goading it in its paroxysms to the exertion of that supernatural strength with which they endowed its body, and leaving the latter prostrate, exhausted, and helpless when they had satiated their malice upon its agonies. To be "possessed of a devil" was indeed the climax of all mental and corporeal misery. The "casting out of devils" by a mere word or sign, was perhaps the most convincing proof of miraculous power that could be offered to a people with whom the visitation was as general as it was mysterious and incomprehensible.

Mariamne hovered about the fountain, notwithstanding her great fear, as a bird hovers about the bush under which a snake lies coiled, but which shelters nevertheless her nest and her callow young. Standing there, in long dark robes, beneath a flood of moonlight, her face and hands white as ivory by the contrast, her eyes dilating, her head bent forward, her whole attitude that of

painful attention and suspense, she might have been an enchantress composing the spell that should turn the writhing figure before her into stone, cold and senseless as the marble over which it bent. She might have been a fiend, in the form of an angel, directing its convulsions, and gloating over its agonies; or she might have been a pure and trusting saint, exorcising the evil spirit, and bidding it come out of a vexed fellow-creature in that name which fiends and men and angels must alike obey.

Presently the night-breeze coming softly over the Roman camp, brought with it the mellow notes of a trumpet, proclaiming that the watch was changed, and the centurions, each in his quarter, pacing their vigilant rounds. Ere it reached Mariamne's ears, the maniac had caught the sound, and sprang to his feet, with his head thrown back and his muscles braced for a spring, like some beast of chase alarmed by the first challenge of the hound. Gazing wildly about him, he saw the girl's figure standing clear and distinct in the open moonlight, and raising a howl of fearful mirth, he leaped his own height from the ground, and made towards her with the headlong rush of a madman. Then fear completely over-mastered

her, and she turned and fled for her life. It was no longer a curdling horror that weighed down the limbs like lead, and relaxed the nerves like a palsy, but the strong and natural instinct of personal safety, that doubled quickness of perception for escape and speed of foot in flight.

Between herself and her father's house lay a broad and easy range of steps, leading upward to the terrace. Instinctively she dared not trust the ascent, but turned downwards over the level lawn into the gardens, with the maniac in close pursuit. It was a fearful race. She heard his quick-drawn breath, as he panted at her very heels. She could almost fancy that she felt it hot upon her neck. Once the dancing shadow of her pursuer, in the moonlight, actually reached her own! Then she bounded forward again in her agony, and eluded the grasp that had but just missed its prey. Thus she reached a low wall, dividing her father's from a neighbour's ground; feeling only that she must go straight on, she bounded over it, she scarce knew how, and made for an open doorway she saw ahead, trusting that it might lead into the street. She heard his yell of triumph as he rose with a vigorous leap into the air, the dull stroke of his feet as he landed on the turf so close behind her,

and the horror of that moment was almost beyond endurance. Besides, she felt her strength failing, and knew too well that she could not sustain this rate of speed for many paces farther ; but escape was nearer than she hoped, and reaching the door a few yards before the madman, she gained slightly on him as she shot through it, and sped on, with weakening limbs and choking breath, down the street.

She heard his yell once again, as he caught sight of her, but two human figures in front restored her courage, and she rushed on to implore their protection from her enemy ; yet fear had not so completely mastered her self-possession, as to drive her into an obvious physical danger, even to escape encounter with a lunatic. Nearing them, and indeed almost within arm's length, she perceived that one was blasted with the awful curse of leprosy. The moon shone bright and clear upon the white glistening surface of his scarred and mortifying flesh. On his brow, on his neck, in the patches of his wasting beard and hair, on his naked arms and chest, nay, in the very garment girt around his loins, the plague-spots deepened, and widened, and festered, and ate them all away. It would be death to come in contact, even with his garments—nay, worse than death,

for it would entail a separation from the touch of human hand, and the help of human skill.

Yet grovelling there on the bare stones of the street, the leper was struggling for a bone with a strong active youth, who had nearly overpowered him, and whom famine had driven to subject himself to the certainty of a horrible and loathsome fate, rather than endure any longer its maddening pangs. There was scarcely a meal of offal on the prize, and yet he tore it from the leper whom he had overpowered, and gnawed it with a greedy brutish muttering, as a dog mumbles a bone.

Gathering her dress around her to avoid a chance of the fatal contact, Mariamne scoured past the ghastly pair, even in her own imminent terror and distress feeling her heart bleed for this flagrant example of the sufferings endured by her countrymen. The maniac, however, permitted his attention to be diverted for a few moments, by the two struggling figures from his pursuit; and Mariamne, turning quickly aside into a narrow doorway, cowered down in its darkest corner, and listened with feelings of relief and thankfulness to the steps of her pursuer, as, passing this unsuspected refuge, he sped in his fruitless chase along the street.



CHAPTER XII.

DESOLATION.



DANTING like a hunted hind, yet true to the generous blood that flowed in her veins, Mariamne recovered her courage even before her strength.

No sooner was the immediate danger passed, than she cast aside all thoughts of personal safety, and only considered how she might still rescue the man she loved. Familiar with the street in which she had taken refuge, as with every other nook and corner of her native city—for the Jews permitted their women far more liberty than did their Eastern neighbours—she bethought her of taking a devious round in case she should be followed, and then returning by the way she had come, to her father's gardens. It was above all things important that Eleazar should not be made

aware of his daughter's absence ; and she calculated, not without reason, that the fatigues he had lately gone through, would insure a few hours at least of sound unbroken sleep. The domestics, too, of his household, worn-out with watching and hunger, were not likely to be aroused before morning ; she had, therefore, sufficient time before her to put her plan into execution.

She reflected that it was impossible to approach her father's garden unnoticed at this hour, save by the way she had taken in her flight. To go through his house from the street was not to be thought of, as the entrance was probably secured, and she could not gain admittance without giving an explanation of her absence, and exciting the observation she most wished to avoid. Then she fell to thinking on the paths she had followed in her headlong flight, tracing them backward in her mind with that clear feminine perception, which so nearly approaches instinct, and is so superior to the more logical sagacity of man. She knew she could thread them step by step, to the marble basin of the fountain ; and once again at that spot she felt as if her task would be half accomplished, instead of scarce begun.

Doubtless the exertion of mind served to calm

her recent terrors, and to distract attention from the dangers of her present situation—alone in a strange house, with the streets full of such horrors as those she had lately witnessed, and thronged by armed parties of lawless and desperate men.

She had gathered her robes about her, and drawn her veil over her head preparatory to emerging from her hiding-place, when she was driven back by the sound of footsteps, and the clank of weapons, coming up the street. To be seen was to accept the certainty of insult, and to run the risk of ill-usage and perhaps death. She shrank farther back, therefore, into the lower part of the house; and becoming more accustomed to the gloom, looked anxiously about, to ascertain what farther chance she had within, for concealment or escape.

It was a low irregular building, of which the ground-floor seemed to have been used but as a space for passage to and from the upper apartments, and perhaps before the famine consumed them, as a shelter for beasts of burden, and for cattle. Not a particle of their refuse, however, had been left on the dry earthen floor; and though a wooden manger was yet standing, not a vestige remained of halter or tethering ropes,

which had been long since eaten in the scarcity of food.* A boarded staircase, fenced by carved wooden balustrades, led from this court to the upper chambers, which were carefully closed; but a glimmer of light proceeding from the chinks of an ill-fitting door at its head, denoted that the house was not deserted. It was probably inhabited by some of the middle class of citizens; a rank of life that had suffered more than the higher, or even the lower during the siege—lacking the means of the one, and shrinking from the desperate resources of the other.

Mariamne, listening intently to every sound, was aware of a light step passing to and fro, within the room, and perceived besides a savoury smell as of roasted flesh, which pervaded the whole house. She knew by the quiet footfall and the rustle of drapery, that it was a woman whose motions she overheard, and for an instant the

* Moreover, their hunger was so intolerable, that it obliged them to chew everything, while they gathered such things as the most sordid animals would not touch, and endured to eat them; nor did they at length abstain from girdles and shoes; and the very leather which belonged to their shields they pulled off and gnawed: the very wisps of old hay became food to some; and some gathered up fibres, and sold a very small weight of them for four Attic (drachmæ).—Josephus, 'Wars of the Jews,' book vi. sec. 3.

desire crossed her mind to beg for a mouthful of strengthening food, ere she departed on her way—a request she had reason to believe would be refused with anger. She blushed as she thought how a morsel of bread was now grudged, even at her own father's gate; and she remembered the time when scores of poor neighbours thronged it every morning for their daily meal; when sheep and oxen were slain and roasted at a moment's notice, on the arrival of some chance guest with his train of followers.

“It is a judgment!” thought the girl, regarding the afflictions of her people in the light of her new faith. “It may be, we must be purified by suffering, and so escape the final doom. Woe is me for my kindred and for my father's house! What am I, that I should not take my share in the sorrows of the rest?”

Then in a pure and holy spirit of self-sacrifice, she turned wearily away, resolving rather to seek the enemy weak and fasting, than shift from her own shoulders one particle of the burden borne by her wretched fellow-citizens; and ere long the time came when she was thankful she had not partaken, even in thought, of the food that was then being prepared.

Seeking the street once more, she found to her dismay, that the armed party had halted immediately before the door. She was forced again to shrink back into the gloom of the lower court, and wait in fear and trembling for the result. These, too, had been arrested before the house by the smell of food. Wandering up and down the devoted city, such hungry and desperate men scrupled not to take with the strong hand anything of which they had need. By gold and silver, and soft raiment, they set now but little store—of wine they could procure enough to inflame and madden them, but food was the one passionate desire of their senses. Beside his own party, John of Gischala had now attached to his faction numbers of the Sicarii—a band of paid assassins who had sprung up in the late troubles to make a trade of murder—and had also seduced into his ranks such of the Zealots as were weary of Eleazar's rigid, though fervent patriotism, finding the anarchy within the walls produced by the siege, more to their taste, than the disciplined efforts of their chief to resist the enemy. The party that now prevented Mariamne's egress consisted of a few fierce pitiless spirits from these three factions, united in a common

bond of recklessness and crime. It was no troop for a maiden to meet by night in the house of a lone woman, or on the stones of a deserted street, and the girl, trembling at the conversation she was forced to overhear, needed all her courage to seize the first opportunity for escape.

The clang of their arms made her heart leap, as they halted together at the door; but it was less suggestive of evil and violence than their words.

"I have it!" exclaimed one, striking his mailed hand against the post, with a blow that vibrated through the building. "Not a bloodhound of Molossis hath a truer nose than mine, or hunts his game more steadily to its lair. I could bury my muzzle, I warrant ye, in the very entrails of my prey, had I but the chance. There is food here, comrades, I tell ye, cooking on purpose for us. 'Tis strange if we go fasting to the wall to-night!"

"Well said, old dog!" laughed another voice. "Small scruple hast thou, Sosas, what the prey may be, so long as it hath but the blood in it. Come on: up to the highest seat with thee! No doubt we are expected, though the doors be closed and we meet with a cold welcome!"

"Welcome!" repeated Sosas; "who talks of

welcome ! I bid ye all welcome, comrades. Take what you please, and call for more. Every man what he likes best, be it sheep or lamb, or delicate young kid, or tender sweet-mouthed heifer. My guests ye are, and I bid you again walk up and welcome !”

“’Twere strange to find a morsel of food here, too,”—interposed one of the band. “Say, Gyron, is not this the house thou and I have already stripped these three times ? By the beard of old Matthias, there was but half a barley cake left when we made our last visit.”

“True,” replied Gyron, with a brutal laugh, “and the woman held on to it like a wild-cat. I was forced to lend her a wipe over the wrist with my dagger, ere she let go, and then the she-wolf sucked her own blood from the wound, and shrieked out that we would not even leave her *that*. We might let her alone this time, I think, and go elsewhere !”

“Go to !” interrupted Sosas. “Thou speakest like one for whom the banquet is spread at every street corner. Art turning tender, and delicate even as a weaned child, with that grizzled beard on thy chin ? Go to ! I say. The supper is getting cold. Follow me !” With these words the last

speaker entered the house, and proceeded to ascend the staircase, followed by his comrades, who pushed and shouldered each other through the door with ribald jests and laughter, that made their listener's blood run cold. Mariamne in her retreat, was thus compelled to retire step by step, before them to the top of the stairs, dreading every moment that their eyes, gradually accustomed to the gloom, which was rendered more obscure by the moonlight without, should perceive her figure, and their relentless grasp seize upon her too surely for a prey.

It was well for her that the stairs were very dark, and that her black dress offered no contrast in colour to the wall against which she shrank. The door of the upper chamber opened outwards, and she hid herself close behind it, hoping to escape when her pursuers had entered one by one. To her dismay, however, she found that, with more of military caution than might have been expected, they had left a scout below to guard against surprise. Mariamne heard the unwilling sentinel growling and muttering his discontent, as he paced to and fro on the floor beneath.

Through the hinges of the open door, the upper apartment was plainly visible, even by the dim

light of a solitary lamp that stood on the board, and threw its rays over the ghastly banquet there set forth. ' Sick, faint, and trembling with the great horror she beheld, Mariamne could not yet turn her eyes away.

A gaunt grim woman was crouching at the table, holding something with both hands to her mouth, and glaring sidelong at her visitors, like a wild beast disturbed over its prey. Her grisly tresses were knotted and tangled on her brow; dirt, misery, and hunger were in every detail of her dress and person. The long lean arms and hands, with their knotted joints and fleshless fingers, like those of a skeleton, the sunken face, the sallow tight-drawn skin, through which the cheek-bones seemed about to start, the prominent jaw, and shrivelled neck, denoted too clearly the tortures she must have undergone in a protracted state of famine, bordering day by day upon starvation.

And what was that ghastly morsel hanging from those parched thin lips?

Mariamne could have shrieked aloud with mingled wrath, and pity, and dismay. Often had she seen a baby's tiny fingers pressed and mumbled in a mother's mouth, with doting downcast looks, and gentle soothing murmurs, and muttered

phrases, fond and foolish, meaningless to others, yet every precious syllable a golden link of love between the woman and her child. But now, the red light of madness glared in the mother's eye, she was crouching fierce and startled, like the wild wolf in its lair, and her teeth were gnashing in her accursed hunger, over the white and dainty limbs of her last-born child.

Its little hand was in her mouth when the ruffians entered, whose violence and excesses had brought this abomination of desolation upon her house. She looked up with scarce a trace of humanity left in her blighted face.

"You have food here, mother!" shouted Sosas, rushing in at the head of his comrades. "Savoury food, roasted flesh, dainty morsels. What? hast got no welcome for thy friends? We have come to sup with thee unbidden, mother, for we know of old* the house of Hyssop is never ill-provided. Ay, Gyron there, watching down below, misled us sadly. His talk was but of scanty barley-cakes and grudging welcome, while lo, here is a supper fit to set before the high-priest, and the mother

* This frightful supper is said to have been eaten in the dwelling of one Mary of Bethesub, which signifies the House of Hyssop.—Josephus, 'Wars of the Jews,' book vi. sec. 3.

gives a good example, though she wastes no breath on words of welcome. Come on, comrades, I tell you; never wait to wash hands, but out with your knives, and fall to!"

While he spoke, the ruffian stretched his brawny arm across the table, and darted his long knife into the smoking dish. Mariamne behind the door, saw him start, and shiver, and turn pale. The others looked on, horror-struck, with staring eyes fixed upon the board. One, the fiercest and strongest of the gang, wiped his brow, and sat down, sick and gasping, on the floor.

Then the woman laughed out, and her laughter was terrible to hear.

"I did it!" she cried, in loud, triumphant tones. "He was my own child, my fair, fat boy. If I had a hundred sons I would slay them all. All, I tell you, and set them before you, that you might eat and rejoice, and depart full and merry from the lonely woman's house. I slew him at sundown, my masters, when the Sabbath was past, and I roasted him with my own hands, for we were alone in the house, I and my boy. What! will ye not partake? Are you so delicate, ye men of war, that ye cannot eat the food which keeps life in a poor, weak woman like me? It is good food,

it is wholesome food, I tell ye, and I bid you hearty welcome. Eat your fill, my masters, spare not, I beseech you. But we will keep a portion for the child. The child !" she repeated, like one who speaks in a dream : " he must be hungry ere now ; it is past his bed-time, my masters, and I have not given him his supper yet !"

Then she looked on the dish once more, with a vacant, bewildered stare, rocking herself the while, and muttering in strange, unintelligible whispers, glancing from time to time stealthily at her guests, and then upon the horrid fragment she held, which, as though fain to hide it, she turned over and over in her gown. At length she broke out in another wild shriek of laughter, and laid her head down upon the table, hiding her face in her hands.

Pale and horror-struck, with quiet steps, and heads averted from the board, the gang departed one by one. Gyron, who was already wearied of his watch, met them on the stairs, to receive a whispered word or two from Sosas, with a muttered exclamation of dismay, and a frightful curse. The rest, who had seen what their comrade only heard, were speechless still, and Mariamne, listening to their clanking, measured tread as it traversed the lower court and passed out into the

street, heard it die away in the distance, unbroken by a single exclamation even of disgust or surprise.

The boldest of them dared not have stood another moment face to face with the hideous thing from which he fled.

Mariamne, too, waited not an instant after she had made sure that they were gone. Not even her womanly pity for suffering, could overcome her feelings of horror at what she had so lately beheld. She seemed stifled while she remained under the roof where such a scene had been enacted; and while she panted to quit it, was more than ever determined to seek the Roman camp, and call in the assistance of the enemy.

It was obvious even to her, girl as she was, that there was now no hope for Jerusalem within the walls. While her father's faction, and that of John, were neutralizing each other's efforts for the common good,—while to the pressure of famine, and the necessary evils of a siege, were added the horrors of rapine and violence, and daily bloodshed, and all the worst features of civil war,—it seemed that submission to the fiercest enemy would be a welcome refuge, that the rule of the sternest conqueror would be mild and merciful by comparison.

She remembered, too, much that Calchas had explained in the sacred writings they had studied together, with the assistance of that Syrian scroll which proclaimed the good tidings of the new religion, elucidating and corroborating the old. She had not forgotten the mystical menaces of the prophets, the fiery denunciations of some, the distinct statements of others—above all, the loving, merciful warning of the Master himself. Surely the doom had gone forth at length. Here, if anywhere, was the carcase. Yonder, where she was going, was the gathering of the eagles. Was not she in her mission of to-night an instrument in the hands of Providence? A means for the fulfilment of prophecy? If she had felt patriotic scruples before, they vanished now. If she had shrank from betraying her country, dishonouring her father, and disgracing her blood, all such considerations were as nothing now, compared to the hope of becoming a divine messenger, that, like the dove with its olive-branch, should bring back eventual peace and safety in its return.

She had seen to-night madness and leprosy stalking abroad in the streets. Within a Jewish home she had seen a more awful sight even than these. It was in her power, at least, to put an end

to such horrors, and she doubted whether the task might not have been specially appointed her from heaven ; but she never asked herself the question if she would have been equally satisfied of her celestial mission, had Esca not been lying under the wall of the Temple, bound and condemned to die with the light of to-morrow's sun.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE LEGION OF THE LOST.



ERVING herself with every consideration that could steel a woman's heart, Mariamne sought her father's gardens by the way she had already come.

They were deserted now, and the house, at which she could not forbear taking a look that would probably be her last, was still quiet and undisturbed. She would fain have seen her father once more, even in his sleep,—would fain have kissed his unconscious brow, and so taken a fancied pardon for the treason she had resolved to commit,—but it was too great a risk to run, and with a prayer for divine protection and assistance, she bent down to lift the slab of marble that concealed the secret way.

Having been moved so lately in the egress of

Calchas, it yielded easily to her strength, and she descended, not without considerable misgivings, a damp, winding stair, that seemed to lead into the bowels of the earth.

As the stone fell back to its former place, she was enveloped in utter darkness; and while she groped her way along the slimy arch that roofed-in the long, mysterious tunnel, she could not forbear shuddering with dread of what she might encounter, ere she beheld the light of day once more. It was horrible to think of the reptiles that might be crawling about her feet; of the unknown shapes with which at any moment, she might come in contact; of the chances that might block her in on both sides, and so consign her, warm and living, to the grave: worst of all, of the possibility that some demoniac, like him from whom she had so recently escaped, might have taken up his abode here, in the strange infatuation of the possessed, and that she must assuredly become his prey, without the possibility of escape.

Such apprehensions made the way tedious indeed; and it was with no slight feeling of relief, and no mere formal thanksgiving, that Mariamne caught a glimpse of light stealing through the black, oppressive darkness that seemed to tak

her breath away, and was aware that she had reached the other extremity of the passage at last.

A few armfuls of brushwood, skilfully disposed, concealed its egress. These had been replaced by Calchas, in his late visit to the Roman camp, and Mariamne, peering through, could see without being seen, while she considered what step she should take next.

She was somewhat uneasy, nevertheless, to observe that a Roman sentinel was posted within twenty paces, she could hear the clank of his armour, every time he stirred, she could even trace the burnished plumage of the eagle, on the crest of his helmet.

It was impossible to emerge from her hiding-place without passing him; and short as his beat might be, he seemed indisposed to avail himself of it by walking to and fro. In the bright moonlight, there was no chance of slipping by unseen, and she looked in vain for a coming cloud on the midnight sky. He would not even turn his head away from the city, on which his gaze was fastened; and she watched him with a sort of dreary fascination, pondering what was best to be done.

Even in her extremity, she could not but re-

mark the grace of his attitude, and the beautiful outline of his limbs, as he leaned wearily on his spear. His arms and accoutrements, too, betrayed more splendour than seemed suitable to a mere private soldier, while his mantle was of rich scarlet, looped up and fastened at the shoulder with a clasp of gold. Such details she took in mechanically and unconsciously, even as she perceived that, at intervals, he raised his hand to his eyes, like one who wipes away unbidden tears. Soon she summoned her presence of mind, and watched him eagerly, for he stretched his arms towards Jerusalem with a pitiful, yearning gesture, and bowing wearily, leant his crested head upon both arms, resting them against his spear.

It was her opportunity, and she seized it ; but at the first movement she made, the sentinel's attention was aroused, and she knew she was discovered, for he challenged immediately. Even then, Mariamne could not but observe that his voice was unsteady, and the spear he levelled trembled like an aspen in his grasp.

She thought it wisest to make no attempt at deception, but walked boldly up to him, imploring his safe-conduct, and besought him to take her to the tent of the commander at once. The sentinel

seemed uncertain how to act ; and showed, indeed, but little of that military promptitude and decision for which the Roman army was so distinguished.

After a pause, he answered ; and the soft tones, musical even in their trouble, that rang in Mariamne's ears, were unquestionably those of a woman—a woman, too, whose instincts of jealousy had recognized her even before she spoke.

“ You are the girl I saw in the amphitheatre,” she said, laying a white hand, which trembled violently, on the arm of the Jewess. “ You were watching him that day, when he was down in the sand beneath the net. I know you, I say ! I marked you turn pale when the Tribune's arm was up to strike. You loved him then. You love him now ! Do not deny it, girl ! lest I drive this spear through your body, or send you to the guard to be treated like a spy taken captive in the act. You look pale, too, and wretched,” she added, suddenly relenting. “ Why are you here ? Why have you left him behind the walls alone. I would not have deserted you in your need, Esca, my lost Esca !”

Mariamne shivered when she heard the beloved name pronounced in such fond accents by another's lips. Womanlike, she had not been without

suspicious from the first, that her lover had gained the affections of some noble Roman lady—suspicions which were confirmed by his own admission to herself, accompanied by many a sweet assurance of fidelity and devotion ; but yet it galled her even now, at this moment of supreme peril, to feel the old wound thus probed by the very hand that dealt it ; and, moreover, through all her anxiety and astonishment, rose a bitter and painful conviction of the surpassing beauty possessed by this shameless woman, clad thus inexplicably in the garb of a Roman soldier.

Nevertheless, the Jewish maiden was true as steel. Like that mother of her nation who so readily gave up all claim to her own flesh and blood, to preserve it from dismemberment under the award of the wisest and greatest of kings, she would have saved her cherished Briton at any sacrifice, even that of her own constant and unfathomable love. She knelt down before the sentinel, and clasped the scarlet mantle in both hands.

“I will not ask you what or who you are,” she said ; “I am in your power, and at your mercy. I rejoice that it is so. But you will help me, will you not ? You will use all your beauty and all

your influence to save him whom—whom we both love?"

She hesitated while she spoke the last sentence. It was as if she gave him up voluntarily, when she thus acknowledged another's share. But his very life was at stake; and what was her sore heart, her paltry jealousy to stand in the way at such a moment as this?

The other looked scornfully down on the kneeling girl. "You, too, seem to have suffered," said the sentinel. "It is true then, all I have heard of the desolation and misery within the walls? But boast not of your sorrows, think not you alone are to be pitied. There are weary heads and aching hearts here in the leaguer as yonder in the town. Tell me the truth, girl! What of Esca? You know him. You come from him even now. Where is he, and how fares it with him?"

"Bound in the Outer Court of the Temple!" gasped Mariamne, "and condemned to die with the first light of to-morrow's sun!" His fate seemed more terrible and more certain, now that she had forced herself to put it into words.

The Roman soldier's face turned deadly pale. The golden-crested helmet, laid aside for air, released a shower of rich brown curls that fell over

the ivory neck, and the smooth shoulders, and the white bosom panting beneath its breastplate. There could be no attempt at concealment now. Mariamne was obliged to confess that even in her male attire, the woman whom she so feared, yet whom she must trust implicitly, was as beautiful as she seemed to be reckless and unsexed.

They were a lawless and a desperate band, that body of gladiators which Hippias had brought with him to the siege of Jerusalem. None of them but were deeply stained with blood, most of them were branded with crime, all were hopeless of good, fearless and defiant of evil. In many a venturous assault, in many a hand-to-hand encounter, fought out with enemies as fierce and almost as skilful as themselves, they had earned their ominous title; and the very legionaries, though they sneered at their discipline, and denied their efficiency in long-protracted warfare, could not but admit that to head a column of attack, to run a battering-ram under the very ramparts of a citadel, to dash in with a mad cheer over the shattered ruins of a breach, or to carry out any other hot and desperate service, there were no soldiers in the army like the Legion of the Lost.

They had dwindled away, indeed, sadly from

slaughter and disease ; yet there were still some five or six hundred left, and this remnant consisted of the strongest and staunchest in the band. They still constituted a separate legion, nor would it have been judicious to incorporate them with any other force, which, indeed, might have been as unwilling to receive them as they could be to enrol themselves in its ranks ; and they performed the same duties, and made it their pride to guard the same posts they had formerly watched when thrice their present strength.

Under these circumstances, a fresh draft would have been highly acceptable to the Legion of the Lost ; and in their daily increasing want of men, even a single recruit was not to be despised. Occasionally, one of the Syrian auxiliaries, or a member of any of the irregular forces attached to the Roman army, who had greatly distinguished himself by his daring, was admitted into their band, and these additions became less rare as the original number decreased day by day.

An appeal to the good nature of old Hirpinus, backed by a heavy bribe to one of his centurions, insured Valeria's enrolment into this wild, disorderly, and dangerous force, nor in their present lax state of discipline, with the prospect of an im-

mediate assault, had she much to dread from the curiosity of her new comrades. Even in a Roman camp, money would purchase wine, and wine would purchase everything else. Valeria had donned in earnest the arms she had often before borne for sport. "Hippias taught me to use them," she thought, with bitter, morbid exultation; "he shall see to-morrow how I have profited by his lessons!" Then she resolved to feed her fancy by gazing at the walls of Jerusalem; and she had little difficulty in persuading a comrade to whom she brought a jar of strong Syrian wine, that he had better suffer her to relieve him for the last hour or two of his watch.

The Amazons of old, with a courage we might look for in vain amongst the other sex, were accustomed to amputate their right breast that it might not hinder the bow-string when they drew the arrow to its head. Did they never feel, after the shapely bosom was thus mutilated and defaced, a throb of anguish, or a weight of dull dead pain where the flesh was now scarred, and hardened, and cicatrized—nay, something worse than pain beneath the wound, when they beheld a mother nursing a sucking-child? Valeria, too, had resolved, so to speak, that she would cut the very

heart from out of her breast—that she would never feel as a woman feels again. She knew she was miserable, degraded, desperate,—she believed she could bear it nobly now, because she was turned to stone.

Yet, as she leaned on her spear in the moonlight, and gazed on the city which contained the prize she had so coveted and lost, she was compelled to acknowledge that the fibres of that heart she had thought to tear out and cast away, retained their feelings still. For all that was come and gone, she loved him, oh! so dearly, yet; and the eyes of the lost, maddened, desperate woman filled with tears of as deep and unselfish affection as could have been shed by Mariamne herself in her pure and stainless youth.

Valeria, as Hippias had learned by painful experience, was resolute for good and evil. It was this decision of character, joined to the impulsive disposition which springs from an undisciplined life, that had given him his prey. But it was this that thwarted all the efforts he made to obtain the ascendancy over her which generally follows such a link as theirs; and it was this, too, that ere long caused her to tear the link asunder without a moment's apprehension or remorse.

With all his energy and habits of command, the gladiator found he could not control the proud Roman lady, who in a moment of caprice had bowed her head to the very dust for the sake of following him. He could neither intimidate her into obedience, nor crush her into despair, though he tried many a haughty threat, and many an unmanly taunt at her shame. But all in vain; and as he would not yield an inch in their disputes, there was but little peace in the tent of the brave leader who ruled so sternly over the Legion of the Lost. The pair, indeed, went through the usual phases that accompany such bonds as those they chose to wear; but the changes were more rapid than common, as might well be expected, when their folly had not even the excuse of true affection on both sides. Valeria indeed tired first; for as far as the gladiator was capable of loving anything but his profession, he loved her, and this perhaps only embittered the guilty cup that was already sufficiently unpalatable to both. Weariness, as usual, followed fast on the heels of satiety, to be succeeded by irritation, discontent, and dislike; then came rude words, angry gestures, and overt aggression from the man, met by the woman with trifling provoca-

tions, mute defiance, and sullen scorn. To love another, too, so hopelessly and so dearly, made Valeria's lot even more difficult to bear, rendering her fretful, intolerant, and inaccessible to all efforts at reconciliation. Thus the breach widened hour by hour; and on the day when Hippias returned to his tent from the council of war before which Calchas had been brought, Valeria quitted it, vowing never to return.

She had but one object left for which to live. Maddened by shame, infuriated by the insults of the gladiator, her great love yet surged up in her heart with an irresistible tide; and she resolved that she would see Esca once more, ay, though the whole Jewish army stood with levelled spears between them. After that, she cared not if she died on the spot at his feet!

To get within the works was indeed no easy matter; and so close a watch was kept by the Romans on all movements between the lines of the hostile forces, now in such dangerous proximity, that it was impossible to escape from the camp of Titus and join the enemy behind the wall, though the Jews, notwithstanding the vigilance of their countrymen, were trooping to the besiegers' camp by scores, to implore the protection of the con-

queror, and throw themselves on his well-known clemency and moderation.

Valeria, then, had taken the desperate resolution of entering the city with the assault on the morrow. For this purpose she had adopted the dress and array of the Lost Legion. She would at least, she thought in her despair, be as forward as any of those reckless combatants. She would, at least, see Esca once more. If he met her under shield, not knowing her, and hurled her to the ground, the arm that smote her would be that of her glorious and beloved Briton. There was a wild, sweet sadness in the thought that she might perhaps die at last by his hand.

Full of such morbid fancies,—her imagination over-excited, her courage kindled, her nerves strung to their highest pitch, it brought with it a fearful reaction to learn that even her last consolation might be denied her—that the chance of meeting her lover once more was no longer in her own hands. What! had she undergone all these tortures, submitted to all this degradation, for nothing? And was Esca to die after all, and never learn that she had loved him to the last? She could not have believed it, but for the calm, hopeless misery that she read in Mariamne's eyes,

For a while Valeria covered her face and remained silent; then she looked down scornfully on the Jewess, who was still on her knees, holding the hem of the Roman lady's garment, and spoke in a cold, contemptuous tone:—

“Bound and condemned to death, and you are here? You must indeed love him very dearly to leave him at such a time!”

Mariamne's despair was insensible to the taunt.

“I am here,” said she, “to save him. It is the only chance. Oh, lady, help me! help me if only for *his* dear sake!”

“What would you have me do?” retorted the other, impatiently. “Can I pull down your fortified wall with my naked hands? Can you and I storm the rampart at point of spear, and bear him away from the midst of the enemy to share him afterwards between us, as the legionaires share a prey?”—and she laughed a strange, choking laugh while she spoke.

“Nay,” pleaded the kneeling Jewess, “look not down on me so angrily. I pray—I implore you only to aid me! Ay! though you slay me afterwards with your hand if I displease you by word or deed. Listen, noble lady; I can lead the Roman army within the walls; I can bring the

soldiers of Titus into Jerusalem, maniple by maniple, and cohort by cohort, where they shall surprise my countrymen and obtain easy possession of the town; and all I ask in return—the price of my shame, the reward of my black treachery—is, that they will rescue the two prisoners bound in the Outer Court of the Temple, and spare their lives for her sake who has sold honour, and country, and kindred here to-night!”

Valeria reflected for a few seconds. The plan promised well; her woman’s intuition read the secret of the other woman’s heart. A thousand schemes rose rapidly in her brain; schemes of love, of triumph, of revenge. Was it feasible? She ran over the position of the wall, the direction from which Mariamne had come, her own knowledge gained from the charts she had studied in the tent of Hippas—charts that, obtained partly by treachery and partly by observation, mapped out every street and terrace in Jerusalem—and she thought it was. Of her suppliant’s good faith she entertained no doubt.

“There is then a secret passage?” she said, preserving still a stern and haughty manner to mask the anxiety she really felt. “How long is it, and how many men will it take in abreast?”

"It cannot be far," answered the Jewess, "since it extends but from that heap of brushwood to the terrace of my father's house. It might hold three men abreast. I entreat you take me to Titus, that I may prevail on him to order the attack ere it be too late. I myself will conduct his soldiers into the city."

Valeria's generosity was not proof against her selfishness. Like many other women, her instincts of possession were strong; and no sooner had she grasped the possibility of saving Esca, than the old fierce longing to have him for her very own returned with redoubled force.

"That I may rescue the Briton for the Jewess!" she retorted, with a sneer. "Do you know to whom you speak? Listen, girl: I, too, have loved this Esca; loved him with a love to which yours is but as the glimmer on my helmet compared to the red glare of that watch-fire below the hill,—loved him as the tigress loves her cubs,—nay, sometimes as the tigress loves her prey! Do you think I will save him for another?"

Mariamne's face was paler than ever now, but her voice was clear, though very low and sad, while she replied:—

"You love him too! I know it, lady, and there-

fore I ask you to save him. Not for me ; oh ! not for me ! When he is once set free, I will never see him more : this is your price, is it not ? Willingly, heartily I pay it ; only save him,—only save him ! You will, lady ; will you not ? And so you will take me direct to Titus ? See ! the middle watch of the night is already nearly past.”

But Valeria’s plotting brain began now to shape its plans ; she saw the obstacles in her way were she to conduct the girl at once into the presence of Titus. Her own disguise would be discovered, and the Roman commander was not likely to permit such a flagrant breach of discipline and propriety to pass unnoticed. If not punished, she would probably be at least publicly shamed, and placed under restraint. Moreover, the Prince might hesitate to credit Mariamne’s story, and suspect the whole scheme was but a plot to lead the attacking party into an ambush. Besides, she would never yield to the Jewess the credit and the privilege of saving her lover. No : she had a better plan than this. She knew that Titus had resolved the city should fall on the morrow. She knew the assault would take place at dawn ; she would persuade Mariamne to return into the town ; she would mark the secret entrance well. When

the gladiators advanced to the attack, she would lead a chosen band by this path into the very heart of the city; she would save Esca at the supreme moment; and surely his better feelings would acknowledge her sovereignty then, when she came to him as a deliverer and a conqueror, like some fabulous heroine of his own barbarian nation. She would revenge on Hippias all the past weary months of discord; she would laugh Placidus to scorn with his subtle plans and his venturous courage, and the skill he boasted in the art of war. Nay, even Licinius himself would be brought to acknowledge her in her triumph, and be forced to confess that, stained, degraded as she was, his kinswoman had at last proved herself a true scion of their noble line, worthy of the name of Roman! There was a sting, though, in a certain memory that Mariamne's words brought back; their very tone recalled his, when he too had offered to sacrifice his love that he might save its object—and she thought how different were their hearts to hers. But the pain only goaded her into action, and she raised the still kneeling girl with a kindly gesture, and a reassuring smile.

“You can trust me to save him,” said she; “but

it would be unwise to declare your plan to Titus, He would not believe it, but would simply make you a prisoner, and prevent me from fulfilling my object till too late. Show me the secret path, girl; and by all a woman holds most sacred, by all I have most prized, yet lost, I swear to you that the Eagles shall shake their wings in the Temple by to-morrow's sunrise; that I will cut Esca's bonds with the very sword that hangs here in my belt! Return the way you came; be careful to avoid observation; and if you see Valeria again alive, depend upon her friendship and protection for his sake whom you and I shall have saved from death before another day be past!"

So strangely constituted are women, that something almost like a caress passed between these two, as the one gave and the other received the solemn pledge; although Mariamne yielded but unwillingly to Valeria's arguments, and sought the secret way on her return with slow, reluctant steps. But she had no alternative; and the Roman lady's certainty of success imparted some of her own confidence to the weary and desponding Jewess. "At least," thought Mariamne, "if I cannot save him, I can die with him, and then nothing can separate us any more!" Sad as it

was, she yet felt comforted by the hopeless reflection, while it urged her to hasten to her lover at once.

There was no time to be lost. As she looked back to the Roman sentinel, once more motionless on his post, and waved her hand with a gesture that seemed to implore assistance, while it expressed confidence, ere she stooped to remove the brushwood for her return, a peal of Roman trumpets broke on the silence, sounding out the call which was termed "Cock-crow," an hour before the dawn.



CHAPTER XIV.

FAITH.

THERE is nothing in the history of ancient or modern times that can at all help us to realize the feelings with which the Jews regarded their Temple. To them the sacred building was not only the very type and embodiment of their religion, but it represented also the magnificence of their wealth, the pride of their strength, the glory, the antiquity, and the patriotism of the whole people,—noble in architecture, imposing in dimensions, and glittering with ornament, it was at once a church, a citadel, and a palace. If a Jew would express the attributes of strength, symmetry, or splendour, he compared the object of his admiration with the Temple. His prophecies continually alluded to the national building

as being identical with the nation itself; and to speak of injury or contamination to the Temple was tantamount to a threat of defeat by foreign arms, and invasion by a foreign host—as its demolition was always considered synonymous with the total destruction of Judæa; for no Jew could contemplate the possibility of a national existence apart from this stronghold of his faith.

His tendency thus to identify himself with his place of worship was also much fostered by the general practice of his people, who annually flocked to Jerusalem in great multitudes to keep the feast of the Passover; so that there were few of the posterity of Abraham throughout the whole of Syria who had not at some time in their lives been themselves eye-witnesses of the glories in which they took such pride. At the period when the Roman army invested the Holy City, an unusually large number of these worshippers had congregated within its walls, enhancing to a great degree the scarcity of provisions, and all other miseries inseparable from a state of siege.

The Jews defended their Temple to the last. While the terrible circle was contracting day by day, while suburb after suburb was taken, and tower after tower destroyed, they were driven, and,

as it were, condensed gradually and surely, towards the upper city and the Holy Place itself. They seemed to cling round the latter and to trust in it for protection, as though its very stones were animated by the sublime worship they had been reared to celebrate.

It was a little before the dawn, and the Outer Court of the Temple, called the Court of the Gentiles, was enveloped in the gloom of this, the darkest hour in the whole twenty-four. Nothing could be distinguished of its surrounding cloisters, save here and there the stem of a pillar or the segment of an arch, only visible because brought into relief by the black recesses behind. A star or two were faintly twinkling in the open sky overhead; but the morning was preceded by a light vapoury haze, and the breeze that wafted it came moist and chill from the distant sea, wailing and moaning round the unseen pillars and pinnacles of the mighty building above.

Except the sacred precincts themselves, this was perhaps the only place of security left to the defenders of Jerusalem; and here, within a spear's length of each other, they had bound the two Christians, doomed by the Sanhedrim to die. Provided with a morsel of bread, scarce as it was,

and a jar of water, supplied by that spurious mercy which keeps the condemned alive in order to put him to death, they had seen the Sabbath, with its glowing hours of fierce, pitiless heat, pass slowly and wearily away, they had dragged through the long watches of the succeeding night, and now they were on the brink of that day, which was to be their last on earth.

Esca stirred uneasily where he sat; and the movement seemed to rouse his companion from a fit of deep abstraction, which, judging by the cheerful tones of his voice, could have been of no depressing nature.

"It hath been a tedious watch," said Calchas, "and I am glad it is over. See, Esca, the sky grows darker and darker, even like our fate on earth. In a little while day will come, and with it our great and crowning triumph. How glorious will be the light shining on thee and me, in another world an hour after dawn!"

The Briton looked admiringly at his comrade, almost envying him the heartfelt happiness and content betrayed by his very accents. He had not himself yet arrived at that pinnacle of faith, on which his friend stood so confidently; and, indeed, Providence seems to have ordained, that in

most cases such piety should be gradually and insensibly attained, that the ascent should be won slowly step by step, and that even as a man breasting a mountain scales height after height, and sees his horizon widening mile by mile as he strains towards its crest, so the Christian must toil ever upwards, thankful to gain a ridge at a time, though he finds that it but leads him to a higher standard and a farther aim; and that though his view is extending all around, and increasing knowledge takes in much of which he never dreamed before, the prospect expands but as the eye ascends, while every summit gained is an encouragement to attempt another, nobler, and higher, and nearer yet to heaven.

"It will be daylight in an hour," said Esca, in a far less cheerful voice, "and the cowards will be here to pound us to death against this pavement with their cruel stones. I would fain have my bonds cut, and a weapon within reach at the last moment, Calchas, and so die at bay amongst them, sword in hand!"

"Be thankful that a man's death is not at his own choice," replied Calchas, gently. "How would poor human nature be perplexed, to take the happy method and the proper mo-

ment! Be thankful, above all things, for the boon of death itself. It was infinite mercy that bade the inevitable deliverer wait on sin. What curse could equal an immortality of evil? Would you live for ever in such a world as ours if you could—nay, you, in your youth, and strength, and beauty, would you wish to remain till your form was bent, and your beard grey, and your eyes dim? Think, too, of the many deaths you might have died,—stricken with leprosy, crouching like a dog in some hidden corner of the city, or wasted by famine, gnawing a morsel of offal from which the sustenance had long since been extracted by some wretch already perished. Or burnt and suffocated amongst the flaming ramparts, like the maniple of Romans, whom you yourself saw consumed over against the Tower of Antonia but a few short days ago!”

“That, at least, was a soldier’s death,” replied Esca, to whose resolute nature the idea of yielding up his life without a struggle seemed so hard. “Or I might have fallen by sword-stroke, or spear-thrust, on the wall, like a man. But to be stoned to death, as the shepherds stone a jackal in his hole. It is a horrible and an ignoble fate!”

“Would you put away from you the great glory

that is offered you?" asked Calchas, gravely. "Would you die but as a heathen, or one of our own miserable Robbers and Zealots, of whom the worst do not hesitate to give their blood for Jerusalem? Are you not better, and braver, and nobler than any of these? Listen, young man, to him who speaks to you now words for which he must answer at the great tribunal ere another hour be past. Proud should you be of His favour whom you will be permitted to glorify to-day. Ashamed, indeed, as feeling your own unworthiness, yet exulting that you, a young and inexperienced disciple, should have been ranked amongst the leaders and the champions of the true faith. Look upon me, Esca, bound and waiting here like yourself for death. For two-score years have I striven to follow my Master, with feeble steps, indeed, and many a sad misgiving and many a humbling fall. For two-score years have I prayed night and morning, first, that I might have strength to persevere in the way that I had been taught, so that I might continue amongst his servants even though I were the very lowest of the low. Secondly, that if ever the time should come when I was esteemed worthy to suffer for his sake, I might not be too much

exalted with that glory which I have so thirsted to attain. I tell thee, boy, that in an hour's time from now, thou and I shall be received by those good and great men of whom I have so often spoken of to thee, coming forward in shining garments, with outstretched arms, to welcome our approach, and lead us into the eternal light of which I dare not speak even now, in the place which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived. And all this guerdon is for thee, coming into the vineyard at the eleventh hour, yet sharing with those who have borne the labour and heat of the day. Oh, Esca! I have loved thee like a son, yet from my heart, I cannot wish thee anywhere but bound here by my side this night."

The other could not but kindle with his companion's enthusiasm. "Oh, when they come," said he, "they shall find me ready. And I, too, Calchas, believe me, would not flinch from thee now if I could. Nay, if it be His will that I must be stoned to death here in the Outer Court of the Temple, I have learned from thee, old friend, gratefully and humbly to accept my lot. Yet I am but human, Calchas. Thou sayest truly, I lack the long and holy training of thy two-score years.

I have a tie that binds me fast to earth. It is no sin to love Mariamne, and I would fain see her once again."

A tear rose to the old man's eye. Chastened, purified, as was his spirit, and ready to take its flight for home, he could yet feel for human love. Nay, the very ties of kindred were strong within him, here in his place of suffering, as they had been at his brother's hearth.

It was no small subject of congratulation to him that his confession of faith before the Sanhedrim, while it vindicated his Master's honour, should at the same time have preserved Eleazar's character in the eyes of the nation, while his exultation at the prospect of sharing with his disciple the glory of martyrdom, was damped by the reflection that Mariamne must grieve bitterly, as the human heart will, ere her nobler and holier self could become reconciled to her loss. For a moment he spoke not, though his lips moved in silent prayer for both, and Esca pursued the subject that occupied most of his thoughts even at such an hour as this.

"I would fain see her," he repeated, dreamily. "I loved her so well, my beautiful Mariamne. And yet it is a selfish and unworthy wish. She

would suffer so much to look on me lying bound and helpless here. She will know, too, when it is over, that my last thought was of her, and it may be she will weep because she was not here to catch my last look before I died. Tell me, Calchas, I shall surely meet her in that other world. It can be no sin to love her as I have loved!"

"No sin," repeated Calchas, gravely. "None. The God who bears such love for them has called nine-tenths of his creatures to his knowledge through their affections. When these are suffered to become the primary object of the heart, it may be that he will see fit to crush them in the dust, and will smite, with the bitterest of all afflictions, yet only that he may heal. How many men have followed the path to heaven that was first pointed out by a woman's hand? That a woman hath perhaps gone on to tread, beckoning him after her as she vanished, with a holy, hopeful smile. No, Esca, it is not sin to love as thou hast done; and because thou hast not scrupled to give up even this, the great and precious treasure of thy heart, for thy Master's honour, thou shalt not lose thy reward."

"And I shall see her again," he insisted, clinging yet somewhat to earthly feelings and earthly

regrets, for was he not but a young and untrained disciple? "It seems to me, that it would be unjust to part her from me for ever. It seems to me, that heaven itself would not be heaven away from her!"

"I fear thou art not fit to die," replied Calchas, in a low and sorrowful voice. "Pray, my son, pray fervently, unceasingly, that the human heart may be taken away from thee, and the new heart given which will fit thee for the place whither thou goest to-day. It is not for thee and for me to say, 'Give me here, Father, a morsel of bread, or give me there a cup of wine.' We need but implore in our prayers, of Infinite Wisdom, and Infinite Mercy, to grant that which it knows is best for our welfare; and he who has taught us how to pray, has bidden us, even before we ask for food, acknowledge a humble, unquestioning resignation to the will of our Father which is in heaven. Leave all to Him, my son, satisfied that He will grant thee what is best for thy welfare. Distress not thyself with weak misgivings, nor subtle reasonings, nor vain inquiries. Trust, only trust and pray, here in the court of death, as yonder on the rampart, or at home by the beloved hearth, so shalt thou obtain the victory; for, indeed, the

battle draweth nigh. The watches of the night are past, and it is already time to buckle on our armour for the fight."

While he spoke the old man pointed to the east, where the first faint tinge of dawn was stealing up into the sky. Looking into his companion's face, only now becoming visible in the dull twilight, he was struck with the change that a few hours of suffering and imprisonment had wrought upon those fair young features. Esca seemed ten years older in that one day and night; nor could Calchas repress a throb of exultation, as he thought how his own time-worn frame and feeble nature, had been supported by the strong faith within. The feeling, however, was but momentary, for the Christian identified himself at once with the suffering and the sorrowful; nor would he have hesitated in the hearty self-sacrificing spirit that his faith had taught him, that no other faith either provides or enjoins, to take on his own shoulders the burden that seemed so hard for his less-advanced brother to bear. It was no self-confidence that gave the willing martyr such invincible courage; but it was the thorough abnegation of self, the entire dependence on Him, who alone never fails man at his need, the fervent faith,

which could see so clearly through the mists of time and humanity, as to accept the infinite and the eternal for the visible, and the tangible, and the real.

They seemed to have changed places now, that doomed pair waiting in their bonds for death. The near approach of morning seemed to call forth the exulting spirit of the warrior in the older man, to endow the younger with the humble resignation of the saint. "Pray for me that I may be thought worthy," whispered the latter, pointing upwards to the grey light widening every moment above their heads.

"Be of good cheer," replied the other, his whole face kindling with a triumphant smile. "Behold, the day is breaking, and thou and I have done with night, henceforth, for evermore!"



CHAPTER XV.

FANATICISM.

WHILE faith has its martyrs, fanaticism also can boast its soldiers and its champions. Calchas in his bonds was not more in earnest than Eleazar in his breastplate; but the zeal that brought peace to the one, goaded the other into a restless energy of defiance, which amounted in itself to torture.

The chief of the Zealots was preparing for the great struggle that his knowledge of warfare, no less than the words of his brother before the Sanhedrim (words which yet rang in his ears with a vague monotony of repetition), led him to expect with morning. Soon after midnight, he had woken from the slumber in which Mariamne left him wrapped, and without making inquiry for his daughter, or indeed taking any thought of her, he had armed himself at once and prepared to visit

the renewed defences with the first glimpse of day. To do so he was obliged to pass through the Court of the Gentiles, where his brother and his friend lay bound; for in the strength of the Temple itself consisted the last hopes of the besieged, and its security was of the more importance now that the whole of the lower town was in possession of the enemy. Eleazar had decided that if necessary he would abandon the rest of the city to the Romans, and throwing himself with a chosen band into this citadel and fortress of his faith, would hold it to the last, and rather pollute the sacred places with his blood, than surrender them into the hand of the Gentiles. Sometimes, in his more exalted moments, he persuaded himself that even at the extremity of their need, heaven would interpose for the rescue of the chosen people. As a member of the Sanhedrim and one of the chief nobility of the nation, he had not failed to acquire the rudiments of that magic lore, which was called the science of divination. Formerly, while in compliance with custom he mastered the elements of the art, his strong intellect laughed to scorn the power it pretended to confer, and the mysteries it professed to expound. Now, harassed by continual anxiety, sapped by

grief and privation, warped by the unvaried predominance of one idea, the sane mind sought refuge in the shadowy possibilities of the supernatural, from the miseries and horrors of its daily reality.

He recalled the prodigies, of which, though he had not himself been an eyewitness, he had heard from credible and trustworthy sources. They could not have been sent, he thought, only to alarm and astonish an ignorant multitude. Signs and wonders must have been addressed to him, and men like him, leaders and rulers of the people. He never doubted, now that a sword of fire had been seen flaming over the city in the midnight sky; that a heifer, driven there for sacrifice, had brought forth a lamb in the midst of the temple; or that the great sacred gate of brass in the same building had opened of its own accord in the middle watch of the night: nay, that chariots and horsemen of fire had been seen careering in the heavens, and fierce battles raging from the horizon to the zenith, with ultimate tide of conquest and defeat, with all the slaughter and confusion and vicissitudes of mortal war.*

* For a description of these portentous appearances, both previous to, and during the siege of Jerusalem, see Josephus,

These considerations endowed him with the exalted confidence which borders on insanity. As the dreamer finds himself possessed of supernatural strength and daring, attempting and achieving feats which yet he knows the while are impossibilities; so Eleazar, walking armed through the waning night towards the Temple, almost believed that with his own right hand he could save his country—almost hoped that with daylight he should find an angel or a fiend at his side empowered to assist him, and resolved that he would accept the aid of either, with equal gratitude and delight.

Nevertheless, as he entered the cloisters that surrounded the Court of the Gentiles, his proud crest sank, his step grew slower and less assured. Nature prevailed for an instant, and he would fain have gone over to that gloomy corner, and bidden his brother a last kind farewell. The possibility even crossed his brain of drawing his sword and setting the prisoners free by a couple of strokes,

‘Wars of the Jews,’ book vi. sec. 5, as related by the historian with perfect good faith, and no slight reproaches to the incredulity of his obdurate countrymen—that generation of whom the greatest authority has said, “Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.”

bidding them escape in the darkness, and shift for themselves ; but the fanaticism which had been so long gaining on his better judgment, checked the healthy impulse as it arose. "It may be," thought the Zealot, "that this last great sacrifice is required from me—from *me*, Eleazar Ben-Manahem, chosen to save my people from destruction this day. Shall I grudge the victim, bound as he is now with cords to the altar? No, not though my father's blood will redden it when he dies. Shall I spare the brave young Gentile, who hath been to me as a kinsman, though but a stranger within my gate, if his life too be required for an oblation? No! not though my child's heart will break when she learns that he is gone forth into the night, never to return. Jephthah grudged not his daughter to redeem his vow; shall I murmur to yield the lives of all my kindred, freely as mine own, for the salvation of Jerusalem?" And thus thinking, he steeled himself against every softer feeling, and resolved he would not even bid the prisoners farewell. He could not trust himself. It might unman him. It might destroy his fortitude; nay it might even offend the vengeance he hoped to propitiate. Besides, if he were known to have held com-

munication with two professed Christians, where would be the popularity and influence on which he calculated to bear him in triumph through the great decisive struggle of the day? It was better to stifle such foolish yearnings. It was wiser to harden his heart and pass by on the other side.

Nevertheless he paused for a moment and stretched his arms with a yearning gesture towards that corner in which his brother lay bound, and while he did so, a light step glided by in the gloom; a light figure passed so near that it almost touched him, and a woman's lips were pressed to the hem of his garment with a long clinging kiss, that bade him a last farewell.

Mariamne, returning to the city by the secret way from her interview with Valeria in the Roman camp, had been careful not to enter her father's house, lest her absence might have been discovered, and her liberty of action for the future impaired. She would have liked to see that father once more; but all other considerations were swallowed up in the thought of Esca's danger, and the yearning to die with him if her efforts had been too late to save. She sped accordingly through the dark streets to the Temple, despising, or rather ignoring those dan-

gers which had so terrified her in her progress during the earlier part of the night. While she stole under the shadow of the cloisters towards her lover, her ear recognized the sound of a familiar step, and her eye, accustomed to the gloom, and sharpened by a child's affection, made out the figure of her father, armed and on his way to the wall. She could not but remember that the morning light which was to bring certain death to Esca, might not, improbably, shine upon Eleazar's corpse as well. He would defend the place she knew to the last drop of his blood; and the Roman would never enter the Temple but over the Zealot's body. She could never hope to see him again, the father, whom, notwithstanding his fierceness and his faults, she could not choose but love. And all she could do was to shed a tear upon his garment, and wish him this silent and unacknowledged farewell. Thus it was that Eleazar bore with him into the battle the last caress he was ever destined to receive from his child.



CHAPTER XVI.

DAWN.

THE day soon broke in earnest, cold and pale on the towers and pinnacles of the Temple. The lofty dome that had been looming in the sky, grand and grey and indistinct, like the mass of clouds that rolls away before the pure clear eye of morning, glowed with a flush of pink; and changed again to its own glittering white of polished marble, as its crest caught the full beams of the rising sun. Ere long the golden roof was sparkling here and there in points of fire, to blaze out at last in one dazzling sheet of flame; but still the Court of the Gentiles below was wrapped in gloom, and the two bound figures in its darkest corner, turned their pale faces upward

to greet the advent of another day,—their last on earth.

But their attention was soon recalled to the Court itself; for through the dark recesses of the vaulted cloisters, was winding an ominous procession of those who had been their judges, and who now approached to seal the fiat of their doom. Clad in long dark robes, and headed by their "Nasi," they paced slowly out, marching two by two with solemn step and stern unpitying mien: it was obvious that the Sanhedrim adhered strictly to that article of their code, which enjoined them to perform "justice without mercy."

Gravely advancing with the same slow step, gradual and inevitable as Time, they ranged themselves in a semicircle round the prisoners,—then halted every man at the same moment; while all exclaimed as with one voice, to notify their completion and their unanimity—

"Here in the presence of the Lord!"

Again a death-like silence, intolerable, and apparently interminable to the condemned. Even Calchas felt his heart burn with a keen sense of injustice and a strange instinct of resistance; while Esca rising to his full height, and in spite of his bonds, folding his brawny arms across his chest,

frowned back at the pitiless Assembly a defiance that seemed to challenge them to do their worst.

Matthias the son of Boethus, then stepped forward from amongst his fellows ; and addressed, according to custom, the youngest member of the Sanhedrim.

“Phineas Ben-Ezra. Hath the doom gone forth?”

“It hath gone forth through the nation,” answered Phineas, in deep sonorous tones ; “to north and south, to east and west ; to all the people of Judæa hath the inevitable decree been made manifest. The accuser hath spoken and prevailed. The accused have been judged and condemned. It is well. Let the sentence be executed without delay !”

“Phineas Ben-Ezra,” interposed Matthias, “can the condemned put forth no plea for pardon or reprieve ?”

It was according to ancient custom that the Nasi should even at the last moment urge this merciful appeal ; an appeal that never obtained a moment’s respite for the most innocent of sufferers. Ere Calchas or Esca could have said a word on their own behalf, Phineas took upon himself the established reply—

"The voice of the Sanhedrim hath spoken! There is no plea,—there is no pardon,—there is no reprieve."

Then Matthias raised both hands above his head, and spoke in low grave accents.

"For the accused, justice; for the offender, death. The Sanhedrim hath heard—the Sanhedrim hath judged—the Sanhedrim hath condemned. It is written, 'If a man be found guilty of blasphemy let him be stoned with stones until he die!' Again I say unto you, Calchas Ben-Manahem, and you, Esca the Gentile, your blood be on your own heads."

Lowering his hands, the signal was at once answered by the inward rush of some score or two of vigorous young men, who had been in readiness outside the Court. These were stripped to the waist, and had their loins girt. Some bore huge stones in their bare arms, others, loosening the pavement with crow and pick-axe, stooped down and tore it up with a fierce and cruel energy, as though they had already been kept waiting too long.

They were followers of John of Gischala, and their chief, though he took no part in the proceeding, stood at their head. His first glance was

one of savage triumph, which faded into no less savage disappointment, as he saw Eleazar's place vacant in the assembly of judges—that warrior's duties against the enemy excusing his attendance on the occasion. John had counted on this critical moment for the utter discomfiture of his rival ; but the latter, whose fortitude, strung as it had been to the highest pitch, could scarcely have carried him through such a trial as was prepared for him, had escaped it by leading a chosen band of followers to the post of danger, where the inner wall was weakest, and the breach so lately made had been hastily and insufficiently repaired.

John saw in this well-timed absence another triumph for his invincible enemy. He turned away with a curse upon his lips, and ordered the young men to proceed at once in the execution of their ghastly duty. It seemed to him that he must not lose a moment in following his rival to the wall, yet he could not resist the brutal pleasure of witnessing that rival's brother lying defaced and mangled in the horrible death to which he had been condemned.

Already the stones were poised, the fierce brows knit, the bare arms raised, when even the savage executioners held their hands, and the grim San-

hedrim glanced from one to another, half in uncertainty, half in pity, at what they beheld. The figure of a woman darting from the gloomy cloister, rushed across the Court to fall in Esca's arms with a strange wild cry, not quite a shout of triumph, not quite a shriek of despair; and the Briton looking down upon Mariamne, folded her head to his breast with a murmur of manly tenderness that even such a moment could not repress, while he shielded her with his body from the threatened missiles, in mingled gentleness and defiance, as a wild animal turned to bay protects its young.

She passed her hands across his brow with a fond impulsive caress. With a woman's instinct, too, of care and compassion, she gently stroked his wrist where it had been chafed and galled by his bonds; then she smiled up in his face, a loving happy smile, and whispered "My own, my dear one; they shall never part us. If I cannot save thee, I can die with thee, oh! so happy. Happier than I have ever been before in my life."

It was a strange feeling for him, to shrink from the beloved presence, to avoid the desired caress, to entreat his Mariamne to leave him; but though his first impulse had been to clasp her in his

arms, his blood ran cold to think of the danger she was braving, the fate to which those tender limbs, that fair young delicate body, would too surely be exposed.

"No, no," he said, "not so. You are too young, too beautiful, to die. Mariamne, if you ever loved me—nay, *as* you love me, I charge you to leave me now."

She looked at Calchas whom she had not yet seemed to recognize, and there was a smile. Yes! a *smile* on her face, while she stood forth between the prisoners, and fronted that whole Assembly with dauntless forehead and brave flashing eyes; her fair slight figure, the one centre of all observation, the one prominent object in the Court.

"Listen," she said, in clear sweet tones, that rang like music to the very furthest cloisters. "Listen all, and bear witness! Princes of the House of Judah, Elders and Nobles, and Priests and Levites of the nation! ye cannot shrink from your duty, ye cannot put off your sacred character. I appeal to your own constitution and your own awful vow. Ye have sworn to obey the dictates of wisdom without favour; ye have sworn to fulfil the behests of justice without mercy.

I charge ye to condemn me, Mariamne, the daughter of Eleazar Ben-Manahem, to be stoned with stones until I die; for that I too am one of those Nazarenes whom men call Christians. Yea, I triumph in their belief, as I glory in their name. Ye need no evidence, for I condemn myself out of my own mouth. Priests of my father's faith, here in its very Temple, I deny your holiness, I abjure your worship, I renounce your creed. This building that overshadows me shall testify to my denunciations. It may be that this very day it shall fall in upon you, and cover you with its ruins. If these have spoken blasphemy, so have I; if these are offenders worthy of death, so am I. I bear witness against you! I defy you! I bid you do your worst on those who are proud and happy to die for conscience' sake!"

Her cheek glowed, her eye flashed, her very figure dilated as she shook her white hand aloft, and thus braved the assembled Sanhedrim with her defiance. It was strange how like Eleazar she was at that moment, while the rich old blood of Manahem mounted in her veins, and the courage of her fathers, that of yore had smitten the armed Philistine in the wilderness, and turned the fierce children of Moab in the very tide of

conquest, now blazed forth at the moment of danger in the fairest and gentlest descendant of their line. Even her very tones thrilled to the heart of Calchas, not so much for her own sake, as for that of the brother whom he so loved, and whose voice he seemed to hear in hers. Esca gazed on her with a fond astonishment; and John of Gischala quailed where he stood, as he thought of his noble enemy, and the hereditary courage he had done more wisely not to have driven to despair.

But the tension of her nerves was too much for her woman's strength. Bravely she hurled her challenge in their very teeth, and then, shaking in every limb, she leaned against the Briton's towering form, and hid her face once more on his breast.

Even the Nasi was moved. Stern, rigid, and exacting, yet apart from his office he too had human affections and human weaknesses. He had mourned for more than one brave son, he had loved more than one dark-eyed daughter. He would have spared her if he could, and he bit his lip hard under the long white beard, in a vain effort to steady the quiver he could not control. He looked appealingly amongst his colleagues,

and met many an eye that obviously sympathized with his tendency to mercy; but John of Gischala interposed, and cried out loudly for justice to be done without delay.

“Ye have heard her!” he exclaimed, with an assumption of holy and zealous indignation; “out of her own mouth she is condemned. What need ye more proof or further deliberation? The doom has gone forth. I appeal to the Sanhedrim that justice be done, in the name of our faith, our nation, our Temple, and our Holy City, which such righteous acts as these may preserve even now from the desolation that is threatening at the very gate!”

With such an Assembly, such an appeal admitted of no refusal. The Seventy looked from one to another and shook their heads, sorrowfully indeed, but with knitted brows and grave stern faces that denoted no intention to spare. Already Phineas Ben-Ezra had given the accustomed signal; already the young men appointed as executioners had closed round the doomed three, with huge blunt missiles poised, and prepared to launch them forth, when another interruption arrived to delay for a while the cruel sacrifice that a Jewish Sanhedrim dignified with the title of justice.

A voice that had been often heard before, though never so wild and piercing as at this moment, rang through the Court of the Gentiles, and seemed to wail among the very pinnacles of the Temple towering in the morning air above. It was a voice that struck to the hearts of all who heard it. Such a voice as terrifies men in their dreams, chilling the blood and making the flesh creep with a vague yet unendurable horror, so that when the pale sleeper wakes, he is drenched with the cold sweat of mortal fear. A voice that seemed at once to threaten and to warn, to pity and to condemn; a voice of which the moan and the burden were ever unbroken and the same—"Woe to Jerusalem! Woe to the Holy City! Sin, and Sorrow, and Desolation! Woe to the Holy City! Woe to Jerusalem!"

Naked, save for a fold of camel's hair around his loins, his coarse black locks matted and tangled and mingled with the uncombed beard that reached below his waist—his dark eyes gleaming with lurid fire, and his long lean arms tossing aloft with the wild gestures of insanity—a tall figure stalked into the middle of the court and taking up its position before the Nasi of the Sanhedrim, began scattering around it on the

floor, the burning embers from a brazier it bore on its head; accompanying its actions with the same mournful and prophetic cry. The young men paused with their arms up in act to hurl; the Nasi stood motionless and astonished; the Sanhedrim seemed paralyzed with fear; and the Prophet of Warning, if prophet indeed he were, proceeded with his chant of vengeance and denunciation against his countrymen.

"Woe to Jerusalem!" said he once more. "Woe to the Holy City! A voice from the East, a voice from the West, a voice from the four winds; a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house; a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides; and a voice against the whole people!" Then he turned aside and walked round the prisoners in a circle, still casting burning ashes on the floor.

Matthias, like his colleagues, was puzzled how to act. If this were a demoniac, he entertained for him a natural horror and aversion, enhanced by the belief he held, in common with his countrymen, that one possessed had the strength of a score of men in his single arm; but what if this should be a true prophet, inspired directly from Heaven? The difficulty would then become far

greater. To endeavour to suppress him might provoke Divine vengeance on the spot; whereas, to suffer his denunciations to go abroad amongst the people as having prevailed with the Great Council of the nation, would be to abandon the inhabitants at once to despair, and to yield up all hope of offering a successful defence to the coming attack. From this dilemma the Nasi was released by the last person on whom he could have counted for assistance at such a time. Pointing to the prisoners with his wasted arm, the prophet demanded their instant release, threatening Divine vengeance on the Sanhedrim if they refused; and then addressing the three with the same wild gestures and incoherent language, he bade them come forth from their bonds, and join him in his work of prophecy through the length and breadth of the city.

“I have power to bind,” he exclaimed, “and power to loose! I command you to rend your bonds asunder! I command you to come forth, and join me, the Prophet of Warning, in the cry that I am commissioned to cry aloud, without ceasing—‘Woe to Jerusalem! Woe to the Holy City! Woe to Jerusalem!’”

Then Calchas, stretching out his bound hands,

rebuked him, calmly, mildly, solemnly, with the patience of a good and holy man—with the instinctive superiority of one who is standing on the verge of his open grave.

“Wilt thou hinder God’s work?” he said. “Wilt thou dare to suppress the testimony we are here to give in His presence to-day? See! even this young girl, weak indeed in body yet strong in faith, stands bold and unflinching at her post! And thou, O man! what art thou, that thou shouldst think to come between her and her glorious reward? Be still! be still! Be no more vexed by the unquiet spirit, but go in peace, or rather stay here in the Court of the Gentiles, and bear witness to the truth, for which we are so thankful and so proud to die!”

The prophet’s eye wandered dreamily from the speaker’s face to those of the surrounding listeners. His features worked as though he strove against some force within that he was powerless to resist; then his whole frame collapsed, as it were, into a helpless apathy, and, placing his brazier on the ground, he sat down beside it, rocking his body to and fro, while he moaned out, as it seemed unconsciously, in a low and wailing voice, the burden of his accustomed chant.

To many in the assembly that scene was often present in their after lives. When they opened their eyes to the light of morning, they saw its glow once more on the bewildered faces of the Sanhedrim ; on the displeasure, mingled with wonder and admiration, that ruffled the austere brow of Matthias ; on the downward scowl that betrayed how shame and fear were torturing John of Gischala ; on the clear-cut figures of the young men he had marshalled, girded, and ready for their cruel office ; on Esca's towering frame, haughty and undaunted still ; on Mariamne's drooping form, and pale, patient face ; above all, on the smile that illumined the countenance of Calchas, standing there in his bonds, so venerable, and meek, and happy, now turning to encourage his companions in affliction, now raising his eyes thankfully to heaven, his whole form irradiated the while by a flood of light, that seemed richer and more lustrous than the glow of the morning sun.

But while the prophet, thus tranquillized and silenced by the rebuke he had provoked, sat muttering and brooding amongst his dying embers on the floor ; while the Sanhedrim, with their Nasi, stood aghast ; while John of Gischala gnawed his

lip in impatient, vindictive hatred ; and the young men gathered closer round their victims, as the wolves gather in upon their prey,—Mariamne raised her head from Esca's breast, and, pushing the hair back from her ears and temples, stood for an instant erect and motionless, with every faculty absorbed in the one sense of listening. Then she turned her flashing eyes, lit up with great hope and triumph, yet not untinged by wistful, mournful tenderness, upon the Briton's face, and sobbed in broken accents, between tears and laughter—

“Saved ! Saved ! beloved ! And by my hand, though lost to me !”

Sharpened by intense affection, her ear alone had caught the distant note of the Roman trumpets sounding for the assault.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST STONE.

BUT the young men would hold their hands no longer. Impatient of delay, and encouraged by a sign from their leader, they rushed in upon the prisoners. Esca shielded Mariamne with his body. Calchas, pale and motionless, calmly awaited his fate. Gioras, the son of Simeon, a prominent warrior amongst the Sicarii, hurling on him a block of granite with merciless energy, struck the old man bleeding to the earth; but while the missile left his hands—while he yet stood erect and with extended arms, a Roman arrow quivered in the aggressor's heart. He fell upon his face stone dead at the very feet of his victim. That random shaft was but the first herald of the storm. In another moment a huge mass of rock, projected

from a powerful catapult against the building, falling short of its mark, struck the prophet as he sat moaning on the ground, and crushed him a lifeless, shapeless mass beneath its weight. Then rose a cry of despair from the outer wall—a confused noise of strife and shouting, the peal of the trumpets, the cheer of the conquerors, the wild roar of defiance and despair from the besieged. Ere long fugitives were pouring through the Court, seeking the shelter of the Temple itself. There was no time to complete the execution—no time to think of the prisoners. John of Gischala, summoning his adherents, and bidding the young men hasten for their armour, betook himself to his stronghold within the Sacred Place. The Sanhedrim fled in consternation, although Matthias and the braver of his colleagues died afterwards in the streets, as became them, under shield. In a few minutes the Court of the Gentiles was again clear, save for the prisoners, one of whom was bound, and one mangled and bleeding on the pavement, tended by Mariamne, who bent over her kinsman in speechless sorrow and consternation. The fragment of rock, too, which had been propelled against the Temple, lay in the centre, over the crushed and flattened body of the prophet, whose

hand and arm alone protruded from beneath the mass. The place did not thus remain in solitude for long. Fighting their retreat step by step, and, although driven backward, contesting every yard, with their faces to the enemy, the flower of the Jewish army soon passed through, in the best order they could maintain, as they retired upon the Temple. Among the last of these was Eleazar; hopeless now, for he knew all was lost, but brave and unconquered still. He cast one look of affection at his brother's prostrate form, one of astonishment and reproof on his kneeling child; but ere he could approach or even speak to her, he was swept on with the resistless tide of the defeated, ebbing before the advance of the Roman host.

And now Esca's eye kindled, and his blood mounted, to a well-known battle-cry. He had heard it in the deadly Circus; he had heard it on the crumbling breach; he had heard it wherever blows rained hard and blood flowed free, and men fought doggedly and hopelessly, without a chance or a wish for escape. His heart leaped to the cheer of the gladiators, rising fierce, reckless, and defiant above all the combined din of war, and he knew that his old comrades and late antagonists

had carried the defences with their wonted bravery, as they led the Roman army to the assault.

The Legion of the Lost had indeed borne themselves nobly on this occasion. Their leader had not spared them; for Hippias well knew that to-day, with the handful left him by slaughter and disease, he must play his last stake for riches and distinction; nor had his followers failed to answer gallantly to his call. Though opposed by Eleazar himself and the best he could muster, they had carried the breach at the first onset—they had driven the Jews before them with a wild headlong charge that no courage could resist, and they had entered the outskirts of the Temple almost at the same moment with its discomfited defenders.

It was their trumpets sounding the advance that reached Mariamne's ear as she stood in the Court of the Gentiles, awaiting the vengeance she had defied.

And amongst this courageous band two combatants had especially signalized themselves by feats of reckless and unusual daring. The one was old Hirpinus, who felt thoroughly in his element in such a scene, and whose natural valour was enhanced by the consciousness of the superiority he had now attained as a soldier over his

former profession of a gladiator. The other was a comrade whom none could identify; who was conspicuous no less from his flowing locks, his beautiful form, and his golden armour, than from the audacity with which he courted danger, and the immunity he seemed to enjoy, in common with those who display a real contempt for death.

As he followed the golden head-piece and the long brown hair, that made way so irresistibly through the press, more than one stout swordsman exulted in the belief that some tutelary deity of his country had descended in human shape to aid the Roman arms; and Titus himself inquired, and waited in vain for an answer, "Who was that dashing warrior, with white arms and shining corslet, leading the gladiators so gallantly to the attack?"

But old Hirpinus knew, and smiled within his helmet as he fought. "The Captain is well rid of her," thought he, congratulating himself the while on his own freedom from such inconveniences. "For all her comely face and winning laugh, I had rather have a tigress loose in my tent than this fair, fickle, fighting fury, who takes to shield and spear as other women do to the shuttle and the distaff!"

Valeria, in truth, deserved little credit for her bravery. While apprehension of danger never for a moment overmastered her, the excitement of its presence seemed to offer a temporary relief to her wounded and remorseful heart. In the fierce rush of battle she had no leisure to dwell on thoughts that had lately tortured her to madness ; and the very physical exertion such a scene demanded, brought with it, although she was unconscious of its severity, a sure anodyne for mental suffering. Like all persons, too, who are unaccustomed to bodily perils, the impunity with which she affronted each, imparted an overweening confidence in her good-fortune, and an undue contempt for the next, till it seemed to herself that she bore a charmed life ; and that, though man after man might fall at her side as she fought on, *she* was destined to fulfil her task unscathed, and reach the presence of Esca in time to save him from destruction, even though she should die the next minute at his feet.

The two first assailants who entered the Court of the Gentiles were Valeria, in her golden armour, and Hirpinus, brandishing the short deadly weapon he knew how to use so well. They were close together ; but the former paused to look around, and the gladiator, rushing to the front, made for

his old comrade, whom he recognized on the instant. His haste, however, nearly proved fatal. The heavily-nailed sandals that he wore afforded but a treacherous foothold on the smooth stone pavement, his feet slipped from under him, and he came with a heavy back-fall to the ground. "*Habet!*"* exclaimed Hippias, from the sheer force of custom, following close upon his tracks; but he strained eagerly forward to defend his prostrate comrade while he spoke, and found himself instantly engaged with a score of Jewish warriors, who came swarming back like bees to settle on the fallen gladiator. Hirpinus, however, covered his body skilfully under his shield, and defended himself bravely with his sword—dealing more than one fatal thrust at such of his assailants as were rash enough to believe him vanquished because down. As more of the gladiators came pouring in, they were opposed by troops of the Jews, who, with Eleazar at their head, made a desperate sally from the Temple to which they had retired, and a fierce hand-to-hand struggle, that lasted several minutes, took place round Hirpinus in the centre of the Court. When he at

* The exclamation with which the spectators notified a conclusive thrust or blow in the Circus.

length regained his feet, his powerful aid soon made itself felt in the fray, and the Jews, though fighting stubbornly still, were obliged once more to retreat before the increasing columns of the besiegers.

Valeria, in the meantime, rushing through the Court to where she spied a well-known form struggling in its bonds, came across the path of Eleazar, at whom she delivered a savage thrust as she met him, lest he should impede her course. The fierce Jew, who had enough on his hands at such a moment, and was pressing eagerly forward into the thickest of the struggle, was content to parry the stroke with his javelin, and launch that weapon in return at his assailant, while he passed on. The cruel missile did its errand only too well. The broad, thirsty point clove through a crevice in her golden corslet, and sank deep in her white tender side, to drink the life-blood of the woman-warrior as she sped onward in fulfilment of her fatal task. Breaking the javelin's shaft in her hands, and flinging the fragments from her with a scornful smile, Valeria found strength to cross the Court, nor did her swift step falter, nor did her proud bearing betray wounds or weakness, till she reached Esca's side.

A loving smile of recognition, two strokes of her sharp blade, and he was free! but as the severed bonds fell from his arms, and he stretched them forth in the delight of restored liberty, his deliverer, throwing away sword and shield, seized his hand in both her own, and, pressing it convulsively to her bosom, sank down helpless on the pavement at his feet.



CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COST OF CONQUEST.

MARIAMNE turned from the still insensible form of Calchas to the beautiful face, that even now, though pale from exhaustion and warped with agony, it pained her to see so fair. Gently and tenderly she lifted the golden helmet from Valeria's brows; gently and tenderly she smoothed the rich brown hair, and wiped away the dews of coming death. Compassion, gratitude, and an ardent desire to soothe and tend the sufferer left no room for bitterness or unworthy feeling in Mariamne's breast. Valeria had redeemed her promise with her life—had ransomed the man whom they both loved so dearly, at that fatal price, for *her*! and the Jewess could only think of all she owed the Roman lady in return; could only strive to tend and comfort her, and minister

to her wants, and support her in the awful moment she did not fail to see was fast approaching. The dying woman's face was turned on her with a sweet, sad smile; but when Mariamne's touch softly approached the head of her father's javelin, still protruding from the wound, Valeria stayed her hand.

"Not yet," she whispered with a noble effort that steadied voice and lips, and kept down mortal agony. "Not yet; for I know, too well, I am stricken to the death. While the steel is there it serves to staunch the life-blood. When I draw it out, then scatter a handful of dust over my forehead, and lay the death-penny on my tongue. I would fain last a few moments longer, Esca, were it but to look on thy dear face! Raise me, both of you. I have somewhat to say, and my time is short."

The Briton propped her in his strong arms, and she leaned her head against his shoulder with a gesture of contentment and relief. The winning eyes had lost none of their witchery yet, though soon to be closed in death. Perhaps they never shone with so soft and sweet a lustre as now, while they looked upon the object of a wild, foolish, and impossible love. While one white hand was laid

upon the javelin's head, and held it in its place, the other wandered over Esca's features in a fond caress, to be wetted with his tears.

Her voice was failing, her strength was ebbing fast, but the brave spirit of the Mutian line held out, tameless and unshaken still. "I have conquered," gasped the Roman lady, in broken accents and with quick coming breath. "I have conquered, though at the cost of life. What then? Victory can never be bought too dear. Esca, I swore to rescue thee. I swore thou shouldst be mine. Now have I kept my oath. I have bought thee with my blood and I give thee—*give* thee, my own, to this brave girl, who risked her life to save thee too, and who loves thee well. But not so well, not half so well, as I have done. Esca, my noble one, come closer, closer yet." She drew his face down nearer and nearer to her own while she guided his hand to the javelin's head, still fast in her side. "I can bear this agony no longer," she gasped, "but it is not hard to die in thine arms, and by thy dear hand!"

Thus speaking, she closed his grasp within her own, round the steel, and drew it gently from the wound. The blood welled up in dark-red jets to pour forth, as it cleared its channel, in one con-

tinuous stream that soon drained life away. With a quiver of her dainty limbs, with a smile deepening in her fair face, with her fond eyes fixed on the man she loved, and her lips pressed against his hand, the spirit of that beautiful, imperious, and wilful woman passed away into eternity.

Blinded by their tears, neither Esca nor Mariamne were, for the moment, conscious of aught but the sad fate of her who had twice saved the one from death, and to whom the other had so lately appealed as the only source of aid in her great need. Dearly as he loved the living woman by his side, the Briton could not refrain from a burst of bitter sorrow while he looked on the noble form of Valeria lying dead at his feet; and Mariamne forgot her own griefs, her own injuries, in holy pity for her who had sacrificed virtue, happiness, wealth, life itself in his behalf, whom she, too, loved more dearly than it behoves human weakness to love anything this side the grave.

But the living now claimed that attention which it availed no longer to bestow upon the dead. Calchas, though sadly bruised and mangled, began to show signs of restored life. The stone that stretched him on the pavement had, indeed, dealt a fatal injury; but though it stunned him for a

time, had failed to inflict instantaneous death. The colour was now returning to his cheek, his breath came in long deep sighs, and he raised his hand to his head with a gesture of renewed consciousness, denoted by a sense of pain.

Esca, careless and almost unaware of the conflict raging around, bent sorrowfully over his old friend, and devoted all his faculties to the task of aiding Mariamne in her efforts to alleviate his sufferings.

In the meantime, the tide of battle surged to and fro, with increasing volume and unmitigated fury. The Legion of the Lost, flushed with success, and secure of support from the whole Roman army in their rear, pressed the Jews with the exulting and unremitting energy of the hunter closing in on his prey. These, like the wild beast driven to the toils, turned to bay with the dreadful courage of *désespoir*. Led by Eleazar, who was ever present where most needed, they made repeated sallies from the body of the Temple, endeavouring to regain the ground they had lost, at least as far as the entrance to the Court of the Gentiles. This became, therefore, an arena in which many a mortal combat was fought out hand to hand, and was several times taken and retaken with alternate success.

Hippias, according to his wont, was conspicuous in the fray. It was his ambition to lead his gladiators into the Holy Place itself, before Titus should come up, and with such an object he seemed to outdo to-day the daring feats of valour for which he had previously been celebrated. Hirpinus, who had no sooner regained his feet than he went to work again as though, like the fabled Titan, he derived renewed energy from the kisses of mother Earth, expostulated more than once with his leader on the dangers he affronted, and the numerical odds he did not hesitate to engage, but received to each warning the same reply. Pointing with dripping sword at the golden roof of the temple flashing conspicuously over their heads, "Yonder," said the fencing-master, "is the ransom of a kingdom. I will win it with my own hand for the legion, and share it amongst you equally, man by man!"

Such a prospect inspired the gladiators with even more than their usual daring; and though many a stout swordsman went down with his face to the enemy, and many a bold eye looked its last on the coveted spoil, ere it grew dark for ever, the survivors did but close in the fiercer, to fight on step by step, and stroke by stroke, till the

court was strewed with corpses, and its pavement slippery with blood.

During a pause in the reeling strife, and while marshalling his men, who had again driven the Jews into the Temple, for a fresh and decisive attack, Hippias found himself in that corner of the court where Esca and Mariamne were still bending over the prostrate form of Calchas. Without a symptom of astonishment or jealousy, but with his careless, half-contemptuous laugh, the fencing-master recognized his former pupil, and the girl whom he had once before seen in the porch of the Tribune's mansion at Rome. Taking off his heavy helmet, he wiped his brows, and leaned for a space on his shield. "Go to the rear," said he, "and take the lass with thee, man, since she seems to hang like a dog round thy neck, wherever there is fighting to be done. Give yourselves up to the Tenth Legion, and tell Licinius, who commands it, you are my prisoners. 'Tis your only chance of safety, my pretty damsel, and none of your sex ever yet had cause to rue her trust in Hippias. You may tell him also, Esca, that if he make not the more haste, I shall have taken the Temple, and all belonging to it, without his help. Off with

thee, lad ! this is no place for a woman. Get her out of it as quick as thou canst."

But the Briton pointed downward to Calchas, who had again become unconscious, and whose head was resting on Mariamne's knees. His gesture drew the attention of Hippias to the ground, cumbered as it was with slain. He had begun with a brutal laugh to bid his pupil "leave the carrion for the vultures," but the sentence died out on his lips, which turned deadly white, while his eyes stared vacantly and the shield, on which he had been leaning, fell with a clang to the stones.

There at his very feet over the golden breast-plate was the dead face of Valeria ; and the heart of the brave, reckless, and unprincipled soldier smote him with a cruel pang, for something told him that his own wilful pride and selfishness had begun that work, which was completed, to his eternal self-reproach, down there.

He never thought he loved her so dearly. He recalled, as if it were but yesterday, the first time he ever saw her, beautiful and sumptuous, and haughty, looking down from her cushioned chair by the equestrian row, with the well-known

scornful glance that possessed for him so keen a charm. He remembered how it kindled into approval as it met his own, and how his heart thrilled under his buckler, though he stood face to face with a mortal foe. He remembered how fondly he clung to that mutual glance of recognition, the only link between them, renewed more frankly and more kindly at every succeeding show, till, raising his eyes to meet it once too often in the critical moment of encounter, he went down badly wounded under the blow he had thus failed to guard. Nevertheless, how richly was he rewarded when fighting stubbornly on his knee, and from that disadvantageous attitude vanquishing his antagonist at last, he distinguished amidst the cheers of thousands, her marked and musical "*Euge!*" syllabled so clearly though so softly, for his especial ear, by the lips of the proud lady, whom from that moment he dared to love!

Afterwards, when admitted periodically to her house, how delightful were the alternations of hope and fear with which he saw himself treated, now as an honoured guest, now as a mere inferior, at another time with mingled kindness and restraint, that, impassible as he thought himself, woke such wild wishes in his heart! How sweet it was to be

sure of seeing her at certain stated hours, the recollection of one meeting bridging over the intervening period so pleasantly, till it was time to look forward to another ! She was to him like the beautiful rose blooming in his garden, of which a man is content at first only to admire the form, ere he learns to long for its fragrance, and at last desires to pluck it ruthlessly from the stem that he may wear it on his breast. How soon it withers there and dies, and then how bitterly, how sadly, he wishes he had left it blushing where it grew ! There are plenty more flowers in the garden, but none of them are quite equal to the rose.

It was strange, how little Hippias dwelt on the immediate past. How it was the Valeria of Rome, not the Valeria of Judæa, for whom his heart was aching now. He scarcely reverted even to the delirious happiness of the first few days when she accompanied him to the East ; he did not dwell on his own mad joy, nor the foolish triumph that lasted so short a time. He forgot, as though they had never been, her caprice, her wilfulness, her growing weariness of his society, and the scorn she scarcely took the trouble to conceal. It was all past and gone now, that constraint and repugnance in the tent, that impatience of each other's presence,

those angry recriminations, those heartless biting taunts, and the final rupture that could never be pardoned nor atoned for now. She was again Valeria of the olden time, of the haughty bearing, and the winning eyes, and the fresh glad voice that sprang from a heart which had never known a struggle nor a fall—the Valeria whose every mood and gesture were gifted with a dangerous witchery, a subtle essence that seems to pervade the very presence of such women—a priceless charm, indeed, and yet a fatal, luring the possessor to the destruction of others, and her own.

∴ Oh, that she could but speak to him once more! Only once, though it were in words of keen reproach or bitter scorn! It seemed like a dream that he should never hear her voice again; and yet his senses vouched that it was waking, cold reality, for was she not lying there before him, surrounded by the slain of his devoted legion? The foremost, the fairest, and the earliest, lost, amongst them all!

He took no further note of Calchas nor of Esca. He turned not to mark the renewed charge of his comrades, nor the increased turmoil of the fight, but he stooped down over the body of the dead woman, and laid his lips reverently to her pale

cold brow. Then he lifted one of her long brown tresses, dabbled as they were in blood, to sever it gently and carefully with his sword, and unbuckling his corslet, hid it beneath the steel upon his heart.

After this, he turned and took leave of Esca. The Briton scarcely knew him, his voice and mien were so altered. But watching his figure as he disappeared, waving his sword, amidst the press of battle, he knew instinctively that he had bidden Hippias the gladiator a long and last farewell.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE GATHERING OF THE EAGLES.

SHOUTING their well-known war-cry, and placing himself at the head of that handful of heroes who constituted the remnant of the Lost Legion, Hippias rallied them for one last desperate effort against the defenders of the Temple. These had formed a hasty barricade on the exigency of the moment from certain beams and timbers they had pulled down in the Sacred Place. It afforded a slight protection against the javelins, arrows, and other missiles of the Romans, while it checked and repulsed the impetuous rush of the latter, who now wavered, hesitated, and began to look about them, making inquiry for the battering-rams, and other engines of war that were to have supported their onset from the rear. In vain Hippias led them, once and again, to carry this unforeseen obstacle.

It was high and firm, it bristled with spears and was lined with archers, above all, it was defended by the indomitable valour of Eleazar, and the gladiators were each time repulsed with loss. Their leader, too, had been severely wounded. He had never lifted his shield from the ground where it lay by Valeria's side, and, in climbing the barricade, he had received a thrust in the body from an unknown hand. While he staunched the blood with the folds of his tunic, and felt within his breastplate for the tress of Valeria's hair, he looked anxiously back for his promised reinforcements, now sorely needed, convinced that his shattered band would be unable to obtain possession of the Temple without the assistance of the legions.

Faint from loss of blood, strength and courage failing him at the same moment, an overpowering sense of hopeless sorrow succeeding the triumphant excitement of the last hour, his thoughts were yet for his swordsmen; and collecting them with voice and gesture, he bade them form with their shields the figure that was called "The Tortoise," as a screen against the shower of missiles that overpowered them from the barricade. Cool, confident, and well-drilled, the gladiators soon settled into

this impervious order of defence, and the word of command had hardly died on his lips, ere the leader himself was the only soldier left out of that moveable fortress of steel.*

Turning from the enemy to inspect its security, his side was left a moment exposed to their darts. The next, a Jewish arrow quivered in his heart. True to his instincts, he waved his sword over his head, as he went down, with a triumphant cheer, for his failing ear recognized the blast of the Roman trumpets—his darkening eye caught the glitter of their spears and the gleam of their brazen helmets, as the legions advanced in steady and imposing order to complete the work he and his handful of heroes had begun.

Even in the act of falling, Esca, looking up from his charge, saw the fencing-master wheel half-round that his dead face might be turned towards the foe; perhaps, too, the Briton's eye was the only one to observe a thin dark stream of blood steal

* In bringing forward their heavy battering-rams, or otherwise advancing to the attack of a fortified place, the Roman soldiers were instructed to raise their shields obliquely above their heads, and linking them together, thus form an impervious roof of steel, under which they could manœuvre with sufficient freedom. This formation was called the *testudo*, or tortoise, from its supposed resemblance to the defensive covering with which nature provides that animal.

slowly along the pavement, till it mingled with the red pool in which Valeria lay.

Effectual assistance had come at last. From the Tower of Antonia to the outworks of the Temple, a broad and easy causeway had been thrown up in the last hour by the Roman soldiers. Where every man was engineer as well as combatant, there was no lack of labour for such a task. A large portion of the adjoining wall, as of the tower itself, had been hastily thrown down to furnish materials, and while the gladiators were storming the Court of the Gentiles, their comrades had constructed a wide, easy, and gradual ascent, by which, in regular succession, whole columns could be poured in to the support of the first assailants.

These were led by Julius Placidus with his wonted skill and coolness. In his recent collision with Esca, he had sustained such severe injuries as incapacitated him from mounting a horse; but with the Asiatic auxiliaries, were several elephants of war, and on one of these huge beasts he now rode exalted, directing from his movable tower the operations of his own troops, and galling the enemy when occasion offered, with the shafts of a few archers who accompanied him on the patient and sagacious animal.

The elephant, in obedience to its driver, a dark, supple Syrian, perched behind its ears, ascended the slope with ludicrous and solemn caution. Though alarmed by the smell of blood, it nevertheless came steadily on, a formidable and imposing object, striking terror into the hearts of the Jews, who were not accustomed to confront such enemies in warfare.

The Tribune's arms were more dazzling, his dress even more costly than usual. It seemed that with his Eastern charger he affected also something of Eastern luxury and splendour; but he encouraged his men, as he was in the habit of doing, with jeer and scoff, and such coarse jests as soldiers best understand and appreciate in the moment of danger.

No sooner had he entered the Court, through its battered and half-demolished gateway, than his quick eye caught sight of the still glowing embers, scattered by the Prophet of Warning on the pavement. These suggested a means for the destruction of the barricade, and he mocked the repulsed gladiators, with many a bitter taunt, for not having yet applied them to that purpose.

Calling on Hirpinus, who now commanded the remnant of the Lost Legion, to collect his followers,

he bade them advance under the *testudo* to pile these embers against the foundations of the wooden barrier.

"The defenders cannot find a drop of water," said he, laughing. "They have no means of stifling a fire kindled from without. In five minutes all that dry wood will be in a blaze, and in less than ten, there will be a smoking gap in the gateway large enough for me to ride through, elephant and all!"

Assisted by fresh reinforcements, the gladiators promptly obeyed his orders. Heaps of live embers were collected and applied to the wooden obstacle so hastily erected. Dried to tinder in the scorching sun, and loosely put together for a temporary purpose, it could not fail to be sufficiently inflammable; and the hearts of the besieged sank within them as the flame began to leap, and the wood-work to crackle, while their last defences seemed about to consume gradually away.

The Tribune had time to lean over from his elephant and question Hirpinus of his commander. With a grave, sad brow, and a heavy heart, the stout old swordsman answered by pointing to the ground where Hippas lay, his face calm and fixed, his right hand closed firmly round his sword.

"*Habet!*" exclaimed the Tribune with a brutal laugh, adding to himself as Hirpinus turned away sorrowful and disgusted, "My last rival down; my last obstacle removed. One more throw for the Sixes, and the great game is fairly won!"

Placidus was indeed now within a stride of all he most coveted, all he most wished to grasp on earth. A dozen feet below him, pale and rigid on the ground, lay the rival he had feared might win the first place in the triumph of to-day; the rival whom he knew to possess the favour of Titus; the rival who had supplanted him in the good graces of the woman he loved. He had neither forgotten nor forgiven Valeria, but he bore none the less ill-will against him with whom she had voluntarily fled. When he joined the Roman army before Jerusalem, and found her beautiful, miserable, degraded, in the tent of the gladiator, he had but dissembled and deferred his revenge till the occasion should arrive when he might still more deeply humiliate the one, and inflict a fatal blow on the other. Now the man was under his elephant's feet, and the woman left alone yonder, friendless and deserted in the camp, could not, he thought, fail eventually to become his prey. He little knew that those who had made each other's

misery in life, were at last united in the cold embrace of death. He had arrived, too, in the nick of time to seize and place on his own brows the wreath that had been twined for him by the Lost Legion and their leader. A little earlier, and Hippias, supplied by himself with fresh troops, would have won the credit of first entering the Temple; a little later, and his triumph must have been shared by Licinius, already with the Tenth Legion close upon his rear. But now, at the glorious opportunity, there was nothing between him and victory save a score of Jewish spearmen, and a few feet of blazing wood.

Leaning over to the unwilling driver, he urged him to goad the elephant through the flames, that its weight might at once bear down what remained of the barricade, and make a way for his followers into the Temple. Ambition prompted him not to lose a moment. The Syrian unwound the shawl from his waist, and spread it over the animal's eyes, while he persuaded it, thus blindfolded, to advance. Though much alarmed, the elephant pushed on, and there was small hope that the shattered, smouldering barrier would resist the pressure of its enormous weight. The last chance of the besieged seemed to fail them, when Eleazar

leaped out through the smoke, and running swiftly to meet it, dashed under the beast's uplifted trunk and stabbed it fiercely, with quick repeated thrusts in the belly. At each fresh stroke the elephant uttered a loud and hideous groan, a shriek of pain and fear, mingled with a trumpet-note of fury, and then sinking on its knees, fell slowly and heavily to the ground, crushing the devoted Zealot beneath its huge carcase, and scattering the band of archers, as a man scatters a handful of grain, over the Court.

Eleazar never spoke again. The Lion of Judah died as he had lived,—fierce, stubborn, unconquered, and devoted to the cause of Jerusalem. Mariamne recognized him as he sallied forth, but no mutual glance had passed between the father and the child. Pale, erect, motionless, she watched him disappear under the elephant, but the scream of horror that rang from her white lips when she realized his fate, was lost in the wild cry of pain, and anger, and dismay, that filled the air, while the huge quivering mass tottered and went down.

Placidus was hurled to the pavement like a stone from a sling. Lying there, helpless, though conscious, he recognized at once the living Esca and the dead Valeria; but baffled wrath and

cherished hatred left no room in his heart for sorrow or remorse. His eye glared angrily on the Briton, and he ground his teeth with rage to feel that he could not even lift his powerless hand from the ground; but the Jewish warriors were closing in with fierce arms up to strike, and it was but a momentary glimpse that Esca obtained of the Tribune's dark, despairing, handsome face.

It was years, though, ere he forgot the vision. The costly robes, the goodly armour, the shapely writhing form, and the wild, hopeless eyes that gleamed with hatred and defiance both of the world he left, and that to which he went.

And now the Court was filling fast with a dun, lurid smoke that wreathed its vapours round the pinnacles of the Temple, and caused the still increasing troops of combatants to loom like phantom shapes struggling and fighting in a dream. Ere long, bright tongues of flame were leaping through the cloud, licking the walls and pillars of the building, gliding and glancing over the golden surface of its roof, and shooting upwards here and there into shifting pyramids of fire. Soon was heard the hollow, rushing roar with which the consuming element declares its victory, and showers of sparks, sweeping like storms across the

Court of the Gentiles, proclaimed that the Temple was burning in every quarter.

One of the gladiators, in the wild wantonness of strife, had caught a blazing fragment of the barricade, as its remains were carried by a rush of his comrades, after the fall of Eleazar, and flung it into an open window of the Temple over his head. Lighting on the carved wood-work, with which the casement was decorated, it soon kindled into a strong and steady flame, that was fed by the quantity of timber, all thoroughly dry and highly ornamented, which the building contained; thus it had communicated from gallery to gallery, and from story to story, till the whole was wrapped in one glowing sheet of fire. From every quarter of the city, from Agrippa's wall to the Mount of Olives, from the Camp of the Assyrians to the Valley of Hinnom, awe-struck faces of friend and foe white with fear, or anger, or astonishment, marked that rolling column, expanding, swaying, shifting, and ever rising higher into the summer sky, ever flinging out its red forked banner of destruction broader, and brighter, and fiercer, with each changing breeze.

Then the Jews knew that their great tribulation was fulfilled—that the curse which had been to

them hitherto but a dead letter and a sealed book was poured forth literally in streams of fire upon their heads—that their sanctuary was desolate, their prosperity gone for ever, their very existence as a nation destroyed, and “the place that had known them should know them no more!”

The very Romans themselves, the cohorts advancing in serried columns to support their comrades, the legions massed in solid squares for the completion of its capture, in all the open places of the town, gazed on the burning Temple with concern and awe. Titus, even, in the flush of conquest, and the exulting joy of gratified ambition, turned his head away with a pitying sigh, for he would have spared the enemy had they but trusted him, would fain have saved that monument of their nationality and their religion, as well for their glory as his own.

And now with the flames leaping, and the smoke curdling around, the huge timbers crashing down on every side to throw up showers of sparkling embers as they fell—the very marble glowing and riven with heat, the precious metal pouring from the roof in streams of molten fire, Esca and Mariamne, half suffocated in the Court of the Gentiles, could not yet bring themselves to

seek their own safety, and leave the helpless form of Calchas to certain destruction.

Loud shouts, cries of agony and despair, warned them that even the burning Temple, at furnace heat, was still the theatre of a murderous and useless conflict. The defenders had set the example of merciless bloodshed, and the Romans, exasperated to cruelty, now took no prisoners and gave no quarter. John of Gischala and his followers, driven to bay by the legions, still kept up a resistance the more furious that it was the offspring of despair. Hunted from wall to wall, from roof to roof, from story to story, they yet fought on while life and strength remained. Even those whose weapons failed them, or who were hemmed in by overwhelming numbers, leaped down like madmen, and perished horribly in the flames.

But although steel was clashing, and blood flowing, and men fighting by myriads around it, the Court of the Gentiles lay silent and deserted under its canopy of smoke, with its pavement covered by the dead. The only living creatures left were the three who had stood there in the morning, bound and doomed to die. Of these, one had his foot already on the border-land between time and eternity.

"I will never desert him," said Esca to his pale companion ; "but thou, Mariamne, hast now a chance of escape. It may be the Romans will respect thee if thou canst reach some high commander, or yield thee to some cohort of the reserve, whose blood is not a-fire with slaughter. What said Hippias of the Tenth Legion and Licinius? If thou couldst but lay hold on his garment, thou wert safe for my sake!"

"And leave thee here to die!" answered Mariamne. "Oh, Esca! what would life be then? Besides have we not trusted through this terrible night, and shall we not trust still? I know who is on my side. I have not forgotten all he taught me who lies bruised and senseless here. See, Esca! He opens his eyes. He knows us! It may be we shall save him now!"

Calchas did indeed seem to have recovered consciousness, and the life so soon to fade glowed once more on his wasted cheek, like an expiring lamp that glimmers into momentary brightness ere its flame is extinguished for ever.



CHAPTER XX.

THE VICTORY.

THE Tenth Legion, commanded by Licinius and guarding the person of their beloved Prince, were advancing steadily upon the Temple. Deeming themselves the flower of the Roman army, accustomed to fight under the eye of Titus himself, there was no unseemly haste in the movements of these highly disciplined troops. None even of that fiery dash, which is sometimes so irresistible, sometimes so dangerous a quality in the soldier. The Tenth Legion would no more have neglected the even regularity of their line, the mechanical precision of their step, in a charge than in a retreat. They were, as they boasted, "equal to either fortune."* Not flushed by success, because

* "Utrique parati."

they considered victory the mere wages to which they were entitled—not discouraged by repulse, because they were satisfied that the Tenth Legion could do all that was possible for soldiers ; and the very fact of their retiring, was to them in itself a sufficient proof that sound strategy required such a movement.

Thus, when the Legion of the Lost dashed forward with wild cheers and an impetuous rush to the attack, the Tenth supported them with even ranks, and regular pace, and a scornful smile on their keen, bronzed, quiet faces. They would have taken the Temple, they thought, if they had the order, with half the noise and in half the time, so they closed remorselessly in, as man after man fell under the Jewish missiles, and preserved through their whole advance the same stern, haughty, and immoveable demeanour, which was the favourite affectation of their courage. Titus had addressed them, when he put himself at their head, to recommend neither steadiness, valour, nor implicit compliance with orders, for in all such requirements he could depend on them, as if they were really what he loved to call them, “his own children!” but he exhorted them to spare the lives of the vanquished, and to respect as far as

possible the property as well as the persons of the citizens. Above all, he had hoped to save the Temple; and this hope he expressed again and again to Licinius, who rode beside him, even until gazing sorrowfully on the mass of lowering smoke, and yellow flame, his own eyes told him that his clemency was too late.

Even then, leaving to his General the duty of completing its capture and investing its defences, he put spurs to his horse and rode at speed round the building, calling on his soldiers to assist him in quenching the flames, shouting, signing, gesticulating: but all in vain.* Though the Tenth Legion were steady as a rock, the rest of the

* Then did Cæsar, both by calling to the soldiers that were fighting with a loud voice, and by giving a signal to them with his right hand, order them to quench the fire; but they did not hear what he said, though he spake so loud, having their ears already dinned by a greater noise another way; nor did they attend to the signal he made with his hand neither, as still some of them were distracted with passion, and others with fighting, neither any threatenings nor any persuasions could restrain their violence, but each one's own passion was his commander at this time; and as they were crowding into the Temple together many of them were trampled on by one another, while a great number fell among the ruins of the cloisters, which were still hot and smoking, and were destroyed in the same miserable way with those whom they had conquered.—Josephus, 'Wars of the Jews,' book vi. sec. 4.

army had not resisted the infection of success; and stimulated by the example of the gladiators, were more disposed to encourage than to impede the conflagration—nor, even had they wished, would their most strenuous efforts have been now able to extinguish it.

Though fighting still went on amongst the cloisters and in the galleries of the Temple; though John of Gischala was still alive, and the Robbers held out, here and there, in fast-diminishing clusters; though the Zealots had sworn to follow their leader's example, dying to a man in defence of the Holy Place; and though the Sicarii were not yet completely exterminated,—Jerusalem might nevertheless be considered at length in possession of the Roman army. Licinius leading the Tenth Legion through the Court of the Gentiles, more effectually to occupy the Temple, and prevent if possible its total destruction, was accosted at its entrance by Hirpinus, who saluted him with a sword dripping from hilt to point in blood.

The old gladiator's armour was hacked and dented, his dress scorched, his face blackened with smoke; but though weary, wounded, and ex-

hausted, his voice had lost none of its rough jovial frankness, his brow none of the kindly good-humoured courage it had worn through all the hardships of the siege.

"Hail, Prætor!" said he, "I shall live to see thee sitting yet once again, high on the golden car, in the streets of Rome. The Temple is thine at last, and all it contains, if we can only save it from these accursed flames. The fighting is over now; and I came back to look for a prisoner who can tell me where water may be found. The yellow roof yonder is flaring away like a torch in an oil-cask, and they must be fond of gold who can catch it by handfuls, guttering down like this in streams of fire. Our people, too, have cut their prisoners' throats as fast as they took them, and I cannot find a living Jew to show me well or cistern. Illustrious! I have won spoil enough to-day to buy a province—I would give it all for as much clear water as would go into my helmet. The bravest old man in Syria is dying in yonder corner for want of a mouthful!"

Returning through the Court in obedience to the Prince's orders, to collect men and procure water, if possible, for the extinction of the con-

flagration, Hirpinus had recognized his young friend Esca with no little surprise and delight. Seeing Calchas, too, for whom, ever since his bold address to the gladiators in the training-school, he had entertained a sincere admiration, lying half suffocated, and at his last gasp on the stones, the old swordsman's heart smote him with a keen sense of pity, and something between anger and shame at his own helplessness to assist the sufferer. He said nothing but truth, indeed, when he declared that he would give all his share of spoil for a helmetful of water ; but he might have offered the price of a kingdom rather than a province, with as little chance of purchasing what he desired. Blood there was, flowing in streams, but of water not a drop ! It was more in despair than hope that he told his sad tale to Licinius, on whom it seemed natural for every soldier in the army to depend, when in trouble either for himself or for others.

Giving his orders, clear, concise, and imperative to his tribunes, the Roman General accompanied Hirpinus to the corner of the Court where Calchas lay. Fallen beams and masses of charred timber were smouldering around, dead bodies, writhed in

the wild contortions of mortal agony, in heaps on every side—he was sick and faint, crushed, mangled, dying from a painful wound, yet the Christian's face looked calm and happy; and he lay upon the hard stones, waiting for the coming change, like one who seeks refreshing slumber on a bed of down.

As the kind eyes turned gently to Licinius in glance of friendly recognition, they were lit with the smile that is never worn but by the departing traveller whose bark has already cast off its moorings from the shore,—the smile in which he seems to bid a hopeful, joyful farewell to those he leaves for a little while, with which he seems to welcome the chill breeze and the dark waters because of the haven where he would be. Mariamne and Esca, bending over with tender care, and watching each passing shade on that placid countenance, knew well that the end was very near.

His strength was almost gone; but Calchas pointed to his kinswoman and the Briton, while looking at Licinius, he said, "They will be your care now. I have bestowed on you countless treasures freely—yonder is the camp of the

Assyrians.* This you shall promise me in return."

Licinius laid his shield on the ground, and took the dying man's hand in both his own.

"They are my children," said he, "from this day forth. Oh! my guide, I will never forget thy teaching nor thy behest."

Calchas looked inquiringly in the face of Hirpinus. The gladiator's rugged features bore a wistful expression of sorrow, mingled with admiration, sympathy, and a dawning light of hope.

"Bring him into the fold with you," he murmured to the other three, and then his voice came loud and strong in full triumphant tones. "It may be that this man of blood also, shall be one of the jewels in my crown. Glory to Him who has accepted my humble tribute, who rewards a few brief hours of imperfect service, a blow from a careless hand, with an eternity of happiness, an immortal crown of gold! I shall see you, friends, again. We shall meet ere we have scarcely parted. You will not forget me in that short interval. And you will rejoice with me in humble, thankful joy, that I have been permitted to in-

* The ground occupied by the Roman lines during the siege.

struct you of heaven, and to show you myself the way!"

Exhausted with the effort he sank back ere he had scarce finished speaking; and his listeners, looking on the calm dead face, from which the radiant smile had not yet faded, needed to keep watch no longer, for they knew that the martyr's spirit was even now holding converse with the angels in heaven.

THE END.

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